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**THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.**

**VOL. II.**

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# THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

BY

KATHARINE KING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### AN UNEXPECTED RETURN.

HEDWORTH VILLARS was to accompany his mother sister, and Cecil, to the Guards' ball, and liked the idea of his evening's entertainment very well indeed. It is something to escort the belle of the room, and to be on the best possible terms with her, even when you know perfectly well, in your inmost heart, that she cares no more for you than for the merest stranger. But with Villars the case was different. He knew perfectly well he occupied a high place in her esteem, both as a valser and otherwise, so that he might count with

certainly on enjoying one or two of the best dances with her.

He was, therefore, very well pleased with himself, and disposed to be on good terms with the rest of the world, as he strolled into his club the afternoon preceding the ball. Being well connected, and owner of a large fortune, he belonged to two or three of the best clubs in London and as he entered White's this particular afternoon, noticed, amongst many other men known to him by sight—though, owing to his short residence in London, he knew few personally—the Duke of Dumbleton, whose fiat on Cecil's beauty had raised her so highly in the opinion of the swell in the Row.

This young nobleman was the catch of the season—a man for whom manœuvring mothers and guileless daughters alike angled. A wary fish he was, too; if the bait was fair and tempting, delighting to play around it, rousing extravagant hopes in girlish and maternal hearts; then, just as the hook seemed about to land the precious prize, slipping off, and beginning the

same game over again in a different quarter. He was a tall, fair young fellow, older than he looked, with a handsome face, rather spoiled by want of expression. A physiognomist would have easily understood Dumbleton's flirtations, seeing by his countenance that, though easily attracted, he had no strength of feeling. Seated by the window, reading the newspaper as Villars entered, was a tall, dark, stern-looking man. His features were very perfect, but the whole expression of the face was so cold and unbending that, without actually being repellent, or having evil very clearly marked on it, it forbade confidence and inspired distrust. He was very well made, activity and power being equally expressed in his long, shapely limbs. Altogether he was a striking person, and Villars's attention was irresistibly drawn to him, from the first moment he perceived him reading in the window.

Some friends of Villars soon engaged his attention, and presently one of them exclaimed,

"Oh! by-the-by, Houston is your Colonel, and

you haven't made his acquaintance yet. I'll introduce you to him; he was somewhere here just now."

Villars glanced in the direction indicated, and knew, by the way in which the stranger he had before noticed looked up at this speech, he must be the man. Before, however, he had time to accept his friend's offer, or make any remark, Colonel Houston, laying aside his paper, rose, and joined them.

"I hear you are in my regiment," he observed, as he came up. "I am delighted to meet some of my new brother officers; as yet, curiously enough, I have seen none of them. I hope we shall be good friends; but I hear you liked Meredith, your late Colonel, so well, that I fear you will think me a bad exchange."

His manner was very friendly, frank, and taking, spoilt only by an imperceptible something that prevented the feeling of trust and confidence such words should have excited. Perhaps it was that, though he smiled as he spoke, and really no doubt intended to be very good-natured, his eyes never lost their cold,

stern look. His lips smiled, never his eyes, which gave a strange double expression to his dark handsome face. Villars couldn't help feeling the half dislike, half admiration, this man always inspired; but he was very willing to respond in a friendly manner to friendly advances, and answered accordingly.

"Come over here," said Houston, "and tell me the names of the others. I may know some of them, though I think I don't. We're going to Dublin, you know."

"Yes, I heard that," answered Villars; and then he repeated the names of his brother officers; when he came to Captain Leveston, the Colonel interrupted him.

"Isn't that the man that has the pretty daughter? We must get him to exchange."

"But why?" asked young Villars, greatly astonished. "We should all miss Leveston dreadfully; we couldn't possibly get on without our Queen."


"That's just it," answered Houston, with his cold smile. "I don't want two authorities in my regiment, and I hear the way you all go on

about this girl is most extravagant. She and her father must leave."

"I'm afraid, Colonel, you will have some trouble in getting 'ours' to see it in that light; Far from letting her leave, we have been planning a grand ball for her, as soon as we are comfortably settled in Dublin, to introduce her to the society there."

Young Villars spoke hotly. He was angry at the mere idea of her leaving them, in the first place, and still more so at the matter being discussed in public, many of those present now beginning to look up at the Colonel's determined tone and his own excited manner of answering.

"I suppose you are one of the young lady's special favourites—you seem such a warm champion," laughed Houston; and this time his eyes did answer the expression of his mouth, but in such a disagreeable fashion that the subaltern felt at once his instinctive dislike to the man had been well-founded. There was a cynical disbelief in all purity and goodness expressed in his manner as he went on, "She will be sorry to lose such a field for her flirtations



and coquetries, I have no doubt ; and you young fellows will be equally sorry to lose so amiable a mistress in the art of flirting ; but it can't be helped. I am determined not to encourage such a state of affairs, and shall try to persuade Captain Leveston to see the matter in a proper light."

"You have no right, Colonel," replied young Villars, angrily, "to accuse Miss Leveston of flirting or coquetry. You know nothing whatever of her, and your speaking about her in that way simply shows your ignorance of her character."

Houston frowned slightly ; he evidently thought his subordinate was speaking out his mind a little too plainly, but seeing the subject annoyed the young man, he pursued it with a scornful laugh.

"If Miss Leveston is the being your chivalry would describe her, she will no doubt see the impropriety of continuing in the regiment against the wishes of the commanding officer. When people think badly of her, if she persists in that mode of life, she can't complain. She'll



have to choose between her flirtations and the good opinion of those about her."

"She has the good opinion of all those who know her already. It says something for her that she has lived so long in the regiment without having the smallest imputation cast on her, and without having caused the slightest dispute or awkwardness. I should like to see you try and flirt with her; you might then find that a girl can be merry and pleasant, friendly and charming, without a thought of making victims of those around."

So saying, Villars walked out of the room, immensely ruffled and discomposed. It was such rank treason to him for any one to speak of his liege lady in that manner that he could not get over it, and went off on the spot to Leveston's house, to repeat all he had heard and solace himself in her society.

As he left the room, Dumbleton remarked—"I say, Houston, weren't you and that young fellow talking about the pretty Miss Leveston, to whom I was introduced to-day? They call her the Queen of the Regiment, or some such

absurd name—makes one think of that Opera, you know. But she's the most charming little lady I've met for some time. If I were you, I should use every means to keep her in the regiment. I'm going to the ball to-night, on purpose to get a dance with her."

Houston laughed lazily.

"So you're bitten too, Dumbleton? Well, I haven't seen this paragon yet, but I don't fancy an Anglo-Indian can be so very charming, and I am sure she can't be well-bred, so I'll leave her to men like you, who can admire such uncultivated beauties. For my part, I prefer high civilization, as exhibited in Lady Edythe Vavasour."

The Colonel's flirtation with that young lady being well known in all polite circles, Dumbleton laughed.

"You needn't tell us that, Houston; but I'll bet you a pony, before you have taken command of your corps for a week, you will vow Miss Leveston as far surpasses the Lady Edythe as that lady does her sister Lady Maud; and you know we all declare that Maud has been

brought forward as a foil to her sister's beauty."

"Done," answered Houston. "I'll book your bet, and I think I'm pretty safe to win. The young lady will accomplish a very hard task if she subjugate me; and I must say I don't fear her wiles. That young fellow who went out just now is dreadfully soft about her; she's going out with his mother and sister."

As he spoke he drew out a little betting-book, and carefully made an entry of his wager with the Duke of Dumbleton, relative to Cecil Leveston. That done, he rose, and strolled to the window, from which, after gazing for a few minutes, he turned, and took his departure, saying,

"I must be off now; Lady Mount Falcon asked me to look in at her five-o'clock tea. I shall see you at the ball to-night, Dumbleton."

In the meantime young Villars had a quiet chat with Cecil and her father, telling them the Colonel had determined on making them leave the regiment. Leveston only smiled and said, "I shall be sorry to have to do that;" but Cecil exclaimed,

"What shall we do? He will make it so disagreeable for you, papa dear—you will have to go. I shall be dreadfully sorry if we are obliged to leave;" and her eyes filled with tears as the prospect rose before her of the long separation, not from the young man who sat beside her, and who sympathised so truly with her in her troubles, but from another colder and sterner nature, who yet loved her well, and for whom she felt the deep devotion that women rarely bestow on more than one man during their lives.

"Cheer up, Queen, don't be down-hearted," Villars said, when he saw how the news affected her. "We will all stand by you, and I think he will hardly persist in his resolution against the wishes of the whole regiment."

She looked up at him quickly; it was the first time since she had known him that he had called her queen. A certain feeling that he liked to have a particular name for his own use had hitherto prevented him from doing so, and instead he had always addressed her as Miss Cecil. Her ear caught the change, and her

heart told her the reason of it. It was because he felt her power and title menaced that he became at once a staunch supporter of the threatened dignity, and adopted the proper form to signify his intention. He saw her look, and laughed a little as he said,

“You notice the change in my address. I will persevere in it until our Colonel is converted, which will be before long. He will be at the ball to-night, and I shall introduce him to you, if I can.”

She put on a comical look of terror. “I am afraid of him,” she said, “he is so determined not to like me. However, I shall have to know him sooner or later, and it is better to meet him in a ball-room than anywhere else; so do as you like, and defend me from his machinations afterwards.”

She looked her very best that night when she appeared before Villars’s enraptured sight as he awaited his party at the cloak-room door. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, a slight pink flush was in her cheek, and her whole dress and get up was such as to heighten and enchain in

every possible way her charming style of beauty.

"If she don't bring down the Colonel to-night," thought Villars, "he is a tougher old fellow than I give him credit for! By Jove! there isn't a girl to be compared with her in the whole room."

Thinking thus, he lost no time in claiming her hand for a dance, and when that was over said,

"Come into this little room; I want to show you the greatest treasures the Guards possess, a trophy of their Dublin campaign a few months ago."

He led her off as he spoke into a small apartment, beautifully fitted up for the convenience of sentimental people, of whom one or two couples were already there, pursuing, in a low tone, the flirtations commenced during the preceding dances. Any such object was far enough from Cecil's mind, and her companion, however much he might have liked it, knew well it would be worse than hopeless to attempt that line. But for the mischief and ill it occasion-

ed that poor girl, she might as well have been indulging in the most reprehensible coquetries.

She had not long set out for the ball when Anstruther called suddenly at Captain Leveston's house. He had returned from the country sooner than he had expected, and of course, immediately he found himself in London, his feet carried him in the direction to which his heart was always turning. He was grievously disappointed when he heard from Guy that the Queen was out; but his disappointment was increased and embittered tenfold when he knew with whom she went. It didn't take him long, however, to determine on a course of action. Cholmondeley, of the Guards, a great friend, indeed a relative of his, was on the committee. He determined to send in for him, and get himself passed into the ball through his means. No sooner thought of than he prepared to put the scheme into execution. So, bidding a hurried farewell to Leveston, he returned to his hotel, to make himself presentable, and before very long had seen his friend and obtained admittance to the ball-room.

His eyes sought her eagerly in all directions throughout the room, but she was not there. It was one of the pauses between two dances, when each one promenades about with his partner, or, in particular cases, seeks some quiet retired nook where tender sentimental conversation may be indulged in without fear of interruption. Thinking of Villars with savage dislike, while yet confident his love would never be unfaithful to him in thought or deed, he made sure she had been led into some such isolated corner by her partner ; for he had no doubt who that partner was, and the certainty only increased his indignation. Roaming round, looking into every ante-room and passage, he at last came upon the object of his search, standing at a table, and looking over a book, her laughing, radiant face turned towards Villars, who was beside her, with quite sufficient devotion and love written on his countenance to be very legible to Anstruther's jealous eyes. At the look and manner of these two unconscious beings, all his trust and faith in her affection for himself vanished, and Anstruther, at once trans-



formed into the cold hard man he had been when he first avowed his love for Cecil, but of which coldness and hardness all trace had lately disappeared, advanced towards them, his sternest, gloomiest look on his dark handsome face.

As he approached, Cecil looked round suddenly and recognized him. A vivid blush overspread her face as he appeared thus unexpectedly before her ; but she betrayed no other sign of emotion, and turned towards him with a bright welcoming smile and outstretched hand. She saw immediately something had gone wrong, and after asking what had happened, and being answered stiffly nothing was the matter, it struck her that her being with Villars might be the reason of his gloomy manner. Turning again to the table, and taking up the book she and Villars had been looking at as Anstruther came up, she went on a little nervously—

“ Have you seen this ? It is most amusing. But first I must tell you we are going to Dublin as soon as the regiment lands, and this is

a trophy or souvenir of the Guards' season in Dublin that Villars was showing me."

Villars laughed; he had kept rather aloof, after exchanging greetings with Anstruther, but he now came forward again.

"Yes," he said, "I had just begun to tell our Queen how all these letters you see so beautifully bound here are written by a lady, begging for an invitation to the ball they gave before leaving Dublin. She hadn't been asked, it appears, but not thinking that a sufficient reason for staying away, she badgered her friends and acquaintances, all day and every day for weeks beforehand, to get her an invitation; and she didn't even confine herself to those she knew pretty well, but wrote to many with whom she had hardly any connection. Queer state of things, isn't it? The Guards thought these letters too good to be lost, so collected them, and had them bound in this Album for exhibition. See, they have placed Miss Baxter's photograph in the first page, and young De Veaux has illuminated some lines underneath. Let's see what they are."

"Yes, this is my photo—the best I've had taken,  
I send it to show you the belle you are losing ;  
When you leave this young beauty among the forsaken,  
Good looks, wit, and dancing alike your'e refusing.

Let me hear from you soon, for my dress wants repairing,  
Before I can show at your illigant ball ;  
I've looked for your note till I've nearly been swearing ;  
Next time I'll not write, but I'll pay you a call."

Cecil laughed. "How terribly they must have made fun of her! She must indeed have been longing to go to the ball, before she could have done such a thing as that."

"Oh!" answered Villars, "the lines are not hers. I think Captain Mounteagle wrote them, just as a sort of explanatory preface ; but these fellows do say that Dublin girls will do anything for a dance, though perhaps, as you can see, the lady here is not in her *première jeunesse*. They accuse the younger portion wrongfully. At any rate, they told the battalion who took their place to look out for Miss Baxter as soon as they went over, but more as a matter of curiosity than from any wish to cultivate her acquaintance ; for I think, if I remember the end

of the story right, she did not get her invitation after all."

Here Anstruther, who had glanced at the album, and listened to the conversation with a dull, indifferent look, asked Cecil for the next dance, that was just beginning. She knew very few people in the room, still her card was quite full, her great beauty having speedily attracted much admiration, and Mrs. Villars having introduced her to everyone whom she thought worthy of that honour. But the young Queen was not one to allow any engagement with strangers to stand between her and her friends—above all, Anstruther; so she gladly gave him that waltz, and they went off together, before her promised partner had succeeded in making out her whereabouts.

## CHAPTER II.

## AT THE GUARDS' BALL.

CECIL'S instinct that something was wrong had not deceived her ; she felt it more and more with every turn they took, to the old yet spirit-stirring strains of the Guards' waltz. They moved as well together as in the old days of their pleasant careless friendship, before Anstruther had yielded to jealous fears, or Cecil had known the name of her heart's feeling ; but somehow there was constraint over them, caused on her side by fear, seeing in his face displeasure, and not daring to ask its cause ; and on his side, by anger, jealous rage, and pained love, which made him move with less of the light free step

of former days than usual. They spoke little, and on indifferent subjects, whilst the dance lasted, but as soon as it was over Anstruther led her into a deep window recess in the little ante-room before mentioned, where he seated her, and placed himself beside her. There was no one then in the room, and even had there been, screened as they were behind heavy curtains, they would have escaped observation from any uninquisitive eyes. For a few minutes neither spoke, but Cecil, frightened now, by very reason of her love, but who had never been afraid before she knew what love was, played nervously with her bouquet, and wondered what he was going to say, and what her offence could be; for that she had again offended was plainly to be seen, and though her heart told her she was guiltless of all known cause of quarrel, she greatly feared it might be some other strange unreasonable charge, like the last, he was about to bring against her.

At length he spoke, and his voice sounded stern and deep to her troubled ears as he said,

"How is it I find you again alone with young Villars, knowing the trouble into which your intercourse with him has already brought you, and the great cause I have for disliking your intimacy with him? Must I order you, as you care for me, and hope to retain my love, to cease all communication with him?"

The blood mounted hotly to her cheeks, and she looked up haughtily. "Do you think, Gerald," she said in a low but very firm voice, from which, if her lover had been a better judge of character, he might have received warning, and desisted in time from his attempt to command her, "that because I love you, and have told you so, I will separate myself from all friends that have been kind and true to me, simply because you disapprove of them?" She went on: "If you show me good and reasonable cause for your dislike, you will always find me ready to acquiesce in your wishes, even whilst matters remain on their present footing between us, but you have no right to demand obedience from me."

"Good and reasonable cause," he interrupted,

speaking in the low tone of intense emotion. "Have I not reason enough in the fact of your former flirtation with Villars, your present plainly shown liking for him, and his admiration for you? Many would cease to love you under circumstances such as these. I, to my misery, cannot, though I am doomed always to doubt your truth, and think I ask but a small proof of your love in demanding the renunciation of this man's friendship."

She looked at him very sadly, and slow large tears filled her eyes as she answered, "It must be so, then; we must part. Do you never think of our proud old motto, '*Honi soit qui mal y pense*?' I have given you my word I am guiltless of what you suspect, and have stooped to defend myself to you, as I would have done to none other, because I loved you well enough to submit to humiliation even at your hands. Do you indeed care for me so little that you will not give me the mere credence of courtesy that you would accord to the wildest subaltern in the regiment? You think you love me," she continued with flashing eyes; "but you are



'mistaken—that is not love which has no faith or trust in its composition. I see more clearly every day that we can never be happy together, and we must part entirely. You will go your way, and in a few short weeks or months this idle fancy of yours will have passed, and you will wonder how you ever entertained it; whilst I," she added with a suppressed sob, "I shall never forget; for I love and trust, and, once you leave me, have nothing to which I can turn for comfort. My heart will follow you always, though you may not know it is near you."

He took her trembling hands, and held them for a moment, looking fixedly into her troubled face.

"If I dare believe you, if I only dare—but no! I am a fool," he went on, dropping her hands again, "trusting a woman's faith and honour, forsooth! Yes, so I did once, when I thought you the most perfect of your sex; but you taught me a lesson, unknown to yourself, and that has cut away the root of all confidence in me. You say I do not care for you, and that we must part. It is just because I

care for you so well that I cannot believe you. If I did not know every ring in your laugh, every note in your voice, even when I see you not, I might doubt the evidence of my senses ; if I did not love you so fondly that I could not stain my lips with falsehood to you, I might pretend you had convinced me, but I cannot do that. I love you so well I am ready to take you with all your faults this minute ; but I will not pretend I don't see them—there would be no affection in that. Don't leave me for this, but try to calm my doubts and fears. Avoid the man who has been the cause of so much trouble to you ; and if my faithful, earnest devotion can repay you for the loss of his friendship, you will never regret the sacrifice. For you know well we can never part ; it is not in my power to leave you unless you desire it ; and surely, my own love, after all the sweet words your lips have spoken to me, you will not be so cruel as to let them utter such a command !”

He leant towards her as he spoke, but she drew back, saying, in a low, broken voice,

“You tempt me sorely, and I would so willingly do as you ask me. How much sorrow and anguish it would save me ! But I know well, a woman who ceases to respect herself would win no respect from others ; and even you, for whose sake I did it, would soon despise me, even more than you do now, if I came to you on those terms. Therefore, if my heart breaks in uttering it, I must bid you go. I shall always trust you, and if sorrow and suspicion come to you, one at least you may be sure will grieve with you, and believe in you ; but until you can say to me, ‘ I have wronged you, henceforth your word is enough for me,’ I cannot consent to be your wife. Even this friendship of ours must cease as much as possible ; it troubles and pains us, and leads to no good. To-night we will say good-bye to the old happy days, and begin life anew. Think of me as kindly as you can ; that is all I ask.”

“You never cared for me,” he whispered hoarsely. “Hard-hearted coquette ! you have played with me, and led me on, only to plunge me into this misery. May you repent it bitter-

ly some day, when this new flame of yours shall have got weary of your Circean beauty, and shall find some fresher face, fairer and more bewitching than yours ; for he will do so, I warn you. Then, when it happens, think of me—whom you have crushed and thrown aside as a broken toy. The Queen of Hearts, men call you. But beware, hearts trampled on, not reigned over, are a fatal empire, and will overwhelm the tyrant in their ruin.”

His wild tone and look frightened her. She shuddered, tried to rise and escape, but he saw her movement, and suddenly changing his tone, whilst he offered his arm to re-conduct her to the dancing-room he went on gently,

“Forgive me—I have alarmed you, but I didn’t mean to do so. I don’t know what I say or do,” he continued, pressing his hand to his head. “Perhaps it is better we should part, and that it should be all over ; all the doubts, the hopes, the fears, the agonies of suspense, the torments of despair—all will be over ! Better so, no doubt—better so, if I could only see it

in that way. Perhaps patience will come in time."

He spoke more to himself than to her, and she never addressed him until he left her with Mrs. Villars.

As they left the ante-room together, each looking troubled and distressed, though Cecil did her best to hide her emotion, a tall handsome man standing near the doorway looked after them.

"Something queer going on there," he muttered; "they both seemed rather upset; and what a sweetly pretty girl she is! I must find out her name, and what's up. I should think, from his face, she had refused that good-looking fellow, only she looks as much put out as he, and my experience of young ladies is that they look rather pleased generally after a feat of that kind."

Colonel Houston it was who soliloquised thus, and from his musings it was evident he was only accustomed to meet one class of woman-kind, of a type, too, very different from gentle, unsophisticated Cecil Leveston; and that

class was probably the one represented by regular London goer-out, or, in provincial towns the thorough-paced garrison belle, who certainly does lay herself open to such an accusation. The Colonel had yet to make acquaintance with a girl as gentle as she was lively, as tender as she was bewitching, as true as she was lovely. Not knowing her name, he had allowed himself to be taken by her appearance more than would have been the case were he aware that the Queen of the Regiment was the object of his admiration. Seeing Villars near him, he asked him if he could tell her name. Villars guessed at once how matters stood, but answered,

“I’ll find it out presently. First, however, you must come and be introduced to our Queen.”

“Well, if I must I may as well go through the ceremony now,” replied Houston lazily, “but mind you find out the young lady’s name for me afterwards. And, I say—who’s that tall fellow coming this way? He was dancing with her just now.”

“That’s Anstruther of ‘ours,’” answered Vil-

lars, leading his Colonel by a roundabout route, and pretending he could see the Queen nowhere, in order to prevent Houston guessing beforehand that the object of his admiration and his *bête noire*, Cecil Leveston, were one and the same. Suddenly turning straight towards her, when he considered his companion sufficiently mystified, Villars walked boldly up to the young girl, as she stood by his mother and said,

“Your Majesty, let me present to you our Colonel and commanding officer; and, allow me to add, he is most anxious to make your acquaintance.”

As Cecil bowed to Colonel Houston, she glanced with a comical smile at Villars, saying in a low tone, “How can you tell such a story?” This little speech, and the byplay which accompanied it, the new-comer caught and understood, thinking, as he observed it, “That young fellow has been telling her all I said at the Club. She’ll be on her guard now, I suppose.”

This thought passed through his mind as he raised his eyes, and saw before him the young

lady he so much admired, and who he now knew must also be his pet aversion, no other than the girl to whom his regiment owed such exaggerated and chivalric allegiance.

She stood there before him, a half shy, half amused smile on her sweet face; such a lovely face too, with its smooth wide brow and large shadowy hazel eyes; eyes that had the mute trustful expression you may often remark in those of a dog, the effect heightened by unusually long dark lashes, a mouth remarkable for its sweet smile, a delicate wild-rose complexion, and quantities of beautiful golden brown hair, full of loose large waves that caught the light on their curves, and formed a glory round her head. Her figure was small, slight, and fragile-looking; and her dress of pale green and white gave her altogether such an airy, fairy-like look that Colonel Houston felt as if he must keep his eyes fixed on her, for fear of her vanishing if he ventured to look away for a second.

She was engaged for every dance, she told him, in answer to his request for one; and then, turning to Villars, added,



"We have two more dances together, and one of them is the next. Suppose I give that to Colonel Houston, and make you content yourself with the one you have already had, and the last for this night. You don't mind for once, I am sure?"

Villars had hardly thought of such a possibility as this, and he looked for a minute or two rather unwilling; whilst the Colonel stood by, feeling more interested in the result than he would have thought possible half an hour before. After a little demur, however, Villars yielded up his claim, on the promise of an extra dance at the next ball to which they should go together, and then walked off, with a feeling that he had performed a very self-denying and creditable action, and that he wished very much he hadn't been such a fool as to do it.

It was a waltz, that next dance, and Houston was by no means a bad performer, though much too lazy to exhibit in that line generally. Now, however, he was so pleased to have secured the beauty he admired, for one dance even, that

he never bestowed a thought on the exertion it would entail.

Her waltzing was perfection—as indeed Houston had guessed, from the minute he had glanced at her graceful slender form ; and the first turn round the room of that dance produced very pleasurable feelings in the mind of each. It is seldom one meets a partner with whom one can move in perfect unison, without effort and without thought. The conviction that she had found such a *rara avis* induced Cecil mentally to determine that the new Colonel could not be half as bad as he had been represented ; and that at any rate she was now safe from interference on his part, as it was not likely he would wish to turn out of the Regiment a partner whose step matched his so exactly.

She judged from her own feelings in this matter, and gave Houston credit for a far greater devotion to dancing than he owned to himself. Indeed, if she had known his thoughts at that minute, she would not have liked him quite so well. He was saying,

“By Jove, she does know how to dance, and no mistake! I don’t wonder at all the fellows in the regiment being in love with her, and I suspect she can play a number of them at the same time. However, I’ll put an end to that; and I’ll give her warning this very night.”

Then he began—

“Young Villars is a great friend of yours: has he told you any of our conversation about the regiment?”

She looked up in his face with a saucy smile, answering, as she did so,

“What makes you think he would do such a thing?”

“You take so strong an interest in ‘ours,’ and are so nearly connected with it, that I thought it not improbable you might have been anxious to know if any changes were in contemplation.”

She laughed.

“I should have been inclined to think, if I had thought about it at all, that things would remain much as they always were.”

"I am afraid you will find yourself mistaken there," he answered, with a little annoyance at her not acknowledging that she was acquainted with his plans, when he was firmly convinced she knew all about them. "If your ally, Villars, has not told you, I may as well do so; for I am sure, when all your other friends land, and find how you have been flirting with that young fellow in their absence, there will be a nice piece of work; therefore I think matters had better be settled, and your connection with the regiment severed, before they arrive."

Cecil drew her hand from his arm, and looked up at him with head erect and flashing eyes. "You don't know me, Colonel Houston," she began, "or you would never have spoken to me as you have just now. None of those who are acquainted with me would accuse me of flirtation, or favouring one of my friends at the expense of others; even those whom I have known from childhood, though dearer to me, no doubt, than newer friends, do not claim from me more attention. Never speak in that

way to me again, if you wish to preserve my acquaintance. If you bring such charges against me out of my hearing, I know I can leave my cause in the hands of my friends with perfect safety. As to severing my connection with the regiment, that can only be done by my father's exchanging or selling out. You can speak to him about it if you like, but I cannot give you any hope of success."

How lovely she looked in her fiery indignation! Houston gazed at her with undisguised admiration, and muttered to himself,

"By Jove, what a plucky little thing it is! I'll see if I can draw her out any further." Then he resumed aloud. "I couldn't have guessed you were different from other young ladies, and they all flirt, and think no harm of it. Are you quite sure you are so exempt from that weakness as you fancy? How about that tall dark fellow I saw with you just now—Anstruther, I think he's called." It was a bow drawn at a venture, but as-

surely if Colonel Houston was anxious to get a rise out of his pretty partner, he succeeded then beyond the most sanguine expectations he could have formed.

She stepped back from him a little, and speaking low and quietly, but with a brilliant flush in her delicate cheeks, and a dangerous glitter in her soft hazel eyes, whilst she seemed to draw her breath in quick nervous gasps, she answered,

"I am at a loss to understand what is your meaning in alluding to Captain Anstruther, who is one of my oldest friends, and equally liked by my father. Your insinuations are, allow me to say, not what I should have expected from a gentleman, and the Colonel of a regiment in which I have always been treated with kindness and respect. I shall not trouble you to take me back to Mrs. Villars. Captain Førdyce," she continued, speaking to a gentleman standing near, with whom she was acquainted, "may I trouble you to take me to my chaperon?"

"With the greatest pleasure," answered the

Captain, offering his arm with much *empressement*, and casting a curious look at Houston as he moved off, wondering greatly what could be the reason of such a sudden move; for that Miss Leveston had been dancing with that gentleman, and had left him in rather an unusual manner, he could not but see. He said nothing, however, and escorted her back to Mrs. Villars, claiming in the meantime a dance as the reward of his services.

As for Houston, he remained where she had left him, perfectly dumbfounded. He had intended to irritate her, just for the pleasure of seeing her pretty face light up with indignation, like the wild look of a fiery Arab horse; but he never intended to make a serious breach between them, or to lose her company so soon. He was too much taken with her to desire anything of the kind, and had just been thinking he should not object to her staying in the regiment, if he could obtain a soft kind look from those beautiful eyes, a sweet gay smile, such as he had seen

her bestow on Villars a few minutes before. And now he had put his foot in it completely; but what was it he had said to excite such a storm? Was it his persisting in the accusation of flirtation, or was it the mention of Anstruther's name that had so aroused her? It must be something connected with that man. He had noticed how disturbed they both looked coming out of the ante-room, and now she had flared up in this way when he was spoken of. That looked like mischief, and at the bare thought of a rival the hot blood mounted to Houston's forehead, and he bit his moustache savagely, muttering,

"I'll get him out of the way before long. I'll have none in the regiment to come between me and her, and when he's gone I'll soon be able to patch up the little huff of to-night."

By which it may be seen the Colonel's plans had changed, and it was no longer Cecil whom he desired to expel from the regiment.

He had not exactly fallen in love with her,



but he admired her greatly, and was baffled and *intrigué* because his advances had not been so successful as they generally were; and being the kind of man who is always more eager in pursuit of a difficult conquest than anxious to achieve an easy one, he swore a deep mental oath that the proud young beauty should be at his feet yet. And he smiled a bad, dark, evil smile as he thought how gaily he would throw her aside when he became tired of the flirtation, and let her fall back on the companionship of raw young subs, if she could any longer enjoy their society after having known him.

As he made this resolve, a remembrance of his bet with Dumbleton flashed through his mind. He laughed cynically, however, and thought, "The girl's sweetly pretty, no doubt, but Dumbleton meant I should be in love with her, and that I am not, most certainly. Only, I'll make her care for me, to punish her for the impertinent way in which she left me to-night, the impudent little minx! And now for the Lady Edythe Vavasour. I haven't seen

her since I entered the ball-room, and she won't be pleased if I don't pay my respects."

Accordingly he went off in search of the young lady who had been acknowledged as the belle of the season until the little unknown outsider, Cecil Leveston, had put in an appearance, when slight defects became apparent in Lady Edythe that had been before unnoticed. As he approached, the high-born beauty's eyes flashed out of their indifferent well-bred languor, and she smiled a very bright pleasant smile, even if it had not the lingering sweetness of expression that characterised Cecil's. She was tall, with a perfect figure, and long beautiful hands and feet; as for her face it was lovely as that of a Grecian statue, and with a little of a statue's immobility and coldness of expression, except, indeed, when talking to Houston. Then no one could have accused her of coldness, for her whole countenance lighted up with a glow of animation and brilliancy that might have told a tale to anyone caring to read it. That fair face, with its clear-cut features and deep, gentle blue eyes, the whole surrounded

by coils of pale gold hair, was admired by many besides Houston, but for none of the others who fluttered around her was her aristocratic repose of countenance ever disturbed. Houston knew this well, and was pleased to know it. Till this night she had been to him the fairest woman he had ever beheld, and though not loving her (he seemed too cold of heart, too calculating of spirit, to feel any true or absorbing affection), he had still thought once or twice of asking her to be his wife. She had a title that would sound well; and besides, she would have a very nice fortune, she and her sister being co-heiresses, so that it would not be a bad thing, looked at in a business light; and then she was really very lovely, and he admired her awfully, so he told himself. And she, poor girl, hedged in by the restraints of society, hardened by a daily repetition in her ears of its worldly code, and watched over with a vigilant care by a fashionable mother, had contrived to throw her heart away on the handsome Colonel as thoroughly and truly as though she had been a shep-

herdess in a French romance. For her credit, be it said, it was not without reason she had done so, as Houston had in every way, except by words, given her to understand that he loved her. Of course her mother had seen none of this, or it would never have been allowed; for though Houston was well enough off, and high up, for so young a man, in the service, still Lady Mount Falcon had a better match in view, in the person of the Marquis of Lenington, a gouty, querulous old man, who, attracted by Lady Edythe's beauty, had done her the honour of offering her his hand through her mother, and was now waiting for the answer, the prudent matron having requested a few days' delay before replying; being, in truth, somewhat afraid of a rebellion on the part of her wilful child, and requiring a little time to prepare the girl and bring her round, before she could venture to broach the subject. Lady Edythe had not yet heard of the honour that awaited her, and though she perceived her mother had been hinting at something important in one or two conversations lately, she was

still in happy ignorance of the state of the case, and welcomed her love, as he approached, with her brightest, happiest smile.

## CHAPTER III.

## OVER THE WATER.

WHILST the Lady Edythe and Houston were enjoying their dance together, and she was inquiring, with a little eagerness, the name of the young lady with whom he had waltzed last, Cecil had confided to Major Paget, whom she had met that evening for the first time since their landing, her interview with the new Colonel. Paget was as indignant as she could possibly wish, at the treatment to which his Queen, and ideal type of perfection, had been subjected, but ended by saying soothingly,

“Never mind him, Queenie, he will find how mistaken he has been, once he joins the regi-

ment, and sees the tone of feeling with regard to you in it; and we'll all stand by you, and see that he doesn't annoy you—be sure of that."

She smiled and thanked him, knowing well that if his friendship could do anything she had it fully and entirely; but she went on, recollecting his confidences before they left India—

"Do you still remain with us? How have you settled matters with your father?"

"Oh! that's all right," he answered, with a well-pleased smile. "I told him I couldn't leave the army—that no other life would suit me, in fact; and when he saw I was set on remaining, he behaved like a brick—told me he'd do every thing he could for me about the management of the property, and that he wouldn't press me any more to sell out, as I really had an objection to do so. So I shall stick to the old colours yet awhile, and hope to see the new Colonel reconciled to your reign, and good friends with you before I leave."

He paused, out of breath with so long a speech, and, looking quite pleased with himself for his eloquence, whilst Cecil could not help

laughing at his kindly, honest face, beaming with satisfaction at his own performance.

She liked Paget dearly, almost as much as he did her, and yet it was impossible not to smile at his thorough-going, impenetrable, obtuse good-nature. He hardly ever thought evil of anyone—malicious people said, because he never thought at all ; but that was not the case, as, whenever he did exert his mind on any subject, his ideas, though slow in coming, were just and to the point. He never repeated a bad report, he never cast a stone at those who were down, but was ever ready to bring forward some good anecdotes of those who were maligned ; and, besides, though often dull in catching jokes, and slow to speak, his pithy, short sayings were full of a quaint, quiet humour entirely their own.

So Cecil was really pleased when she found he would remain with them, and left the ball-room that night, or rather next morning, with a confused idea that she had performed a very plucky action in bearding the Colonel, whom she thought of as “a horrid bear.”



I am sorry to say it of her, but such was the case. She was fully persuaded, however, that the championship of her friends would carry her safe through any difficulties his enmity might raise about her. Her father, she was convinced, would never exchange, as long as it was possible for him to remain; and she certainly didn't want to leave their kind friends, and the dear old corps, no matter what happened.

Then, nestling back in the cushions of Mrs. Villars' roomy carriage, she repeated the whole of her conversation with Houston to an interested audience—consisting of her kind old chaperon, Carrie Villars, and young Hedworth, who had come inside with them, on purpose to discuss the events of the evening, and criticise the get-up of the room and the company. She did not, of course, mention Villars as having been particularly spoken of; indeed she gave the conversation more in general than in particular. Still he was very indignant, and declared vehemently that they would soon teach the Colonel a different line of conduct, when he took command, and appeared among them;

whilst Mrs. Villars said kindly, but gravely,

“Take care, my dear. I am afraid he intends to make himself disagreeable, and you will have to be very cautious if you wish to avoid annoyance.”

These few words of warning, kindly and earnestly spoken, awakened the girl a little to a sense of the difficulty of her position; but she was young, with a proud, wild heart; and when not alone, face to face with her disappointed love, she carried a bold front before the world, and her high spirit often banished all sorrowful thoughts from her mind.

Therefore, when she went with her father to Dublin, on the disembarking of the regiment, she forgot her kind friend’s warning, and felt as little disposed as ever to conciliate the Colonel’s good opinion, or shape her conduct to please his wishes.

The —th Dragoons were quartered at the Portobello barracks, Cecil and her father having lodgings in Leinster Road. They had good rooms, and their horses were stabled at the barracks; for Cecil still kept her horse, or

rather was to get one on landing in Ireland, as the chestnut Tornado had remained in India. This was a point her godfather, old Colonel Meredith, had insisted on; and, moreover, he kept it for her, as Leveston's income was not equal to such a demand upon it, consistent with their usual style of living.

He was a very indulgent godfather, Colonel Meredith, and spoiled his little girl, as he called her most persistently, sending her presents continually of everything that he thought could please the eye or beautify the person of his charming protégée. They arrived in Dublin about the beginning of February, and, thanks to some letters of introduction Mrs. Villars had given Cecil, soon got into the best set; whilst the ladies in barracks, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Tennant, did not find themselves much taken notice of, as at first they would not mention their loneliness even to Cecil, who might have given them a helping hand in the society to which he had obtained admission.

The Colonel had joined, too, but the young Queen had seen nothing of him since the Guards' Ball; of course she could hardly expect he would honour her tea-table with his presence; indeed, after what had occurred, she didn't desire it. Her levees were attended quite as regularly as before, however, and she sometimes fancied that many paid her more attention, and were more particular in calling than they used to be, in former times. A fact which, if it really was as she imagined, could only proceed from their desire to show in what respect they held her, and how anxious they were that she should suffer no annoyance from the Colonel's aversion. Her father had met him, and made one remark, which, though certainly little enough in itself, conveyed a great deal of meaning to Cecil's mind, when coming from such a man as her father, who rarely expressed any opinion on changes in the regiment, unless they pleased him very much. Leveston was telling Cecil one day, after dining at mess, all the little fragments of news he could remember, and

ended by saying, "By-the-by, Colonel Houston was there too: he's quite another sort of man from Meredith." It was all he said, but Cecil immediately came to the conclusion that he had not made himself agreeable, for she knew her father had always regarded Meredith as a pattern commanding officer.

The drawing-room was approaching. Dublin was getting very full, and Cecil, who had made many acquaintances, and went out a great deal, might have enjoyed herself very much, if it had not been for the miserable state of affairs between her and Anstruther. They hardly spoke now, though he came to the house still pretty often, under pretence of talking to his old friend Leveston. During these visits, Cecil was {conscious that, if she happened to be in the room, he watched her incessantly, and followed her with his eyes as she moved, until even Leveston, though unobservant in those matters, began to notice it, and was pleased when the idea entered into his head that his best friend loved his child. He would offer no opposition, he was

determined, if matters stood as he thought; and actuated by a hope that it was so, he tried once or twice to throw them more together. But he soon found that that did not answer at all; for some reason or other, there was a kind of distant manner between them, that he had never remarked formerly, which at last caused him to think he must be mistaken; and that although Anstruther admired her beauty—as what man could help doing?—still he did not care for her in the way Leveston had fancied, and would have wished.

Amongst other friends Cecil had found, one family in particular noticed her, and were kind to her. They took her to everything going on. A good thing for the poor girl, who would otherwise have had to stay at home, her father seldom going out; and when alone she spent her time in dreaming, often for hours together, over what might have been, and the hardness of her fate—worse than that of any other girl she thought it. It was such a cruel thing that he should love

her, and tell her so, yet not be willing to trust her, as he would any one else, no matter how indifferent to him they might be.

After such thoughts she would rouse herself from her painful reverie, with a toss of her head, and a flash in her proud eyes, as she muttered,

“I will live it down. It is nonsense to grieve about one who treats me thus. Surely the heart can learn to forget; the Lethe of the ancients was no fable to those who determined to discover it, and I will do so.”

She would dress herself then to go to a ball with the Beresfords, making herself radiantly beautiful, and feeling as if she could do anything to win oblivion from this fatal love. But when in the glittering ball-room she was sought with flattering words, and admiration followed her everywhere, she would fain have turned with disgust from her court of admirers, and thought, with longing, how welcome to her ears would be the coldest word uttered by the quiet voice she knew so well.

It was at a ball at Mrs. Beresford's house

that Cecil again met Colonel Houston. She had not seen him, as we have said, since they came over; but for all that he had not forgotten her, nor abandoned his project of punishing her for what he called her impertinence; the more so as, a few days after he came over, he met at the United Service Club a friend of his who had been at the Guards' Ball, but whom he had not seen since. This gentleman, after a little conversation, said,

"By Jove, Houston, that was a spicy little thing gave you such a snubbing the other night! I never saw you well taken down before, and your face was something to look at when she left you. Tell us her name, I should like amazingly to make her acquaintance."

"What do you mean?" answered Houston, with his most know-nothing expression. "I don't follow you."

"Oh! yes, you do," answered his friend, sitting astride on a chair, and taking his cigar deliberately from between his lips, staring the while at Houston in an aggravating manner. "She left you, and got Fordyce to take her to



her chaperon. You didn't look best pleased about it."

"Ah! little Leveston, of my regiment. I remember something about it. I daresay I had been telling her I thought young ladies out of place in the army, and I suppose she didn't like it; but, indeed, I don't remember much about it."

His companion laughed, and Houston walked off, determined all the more to be revenged on her for the chaff she had been the means of raising against him. But before he could do anything towards the carrying out of his scheme, it was necessary he should again make friends with her; and, accordingly, at Mrs. Beresford's ball, he resolved to begin putting his plans into execution. She had hardly entered the room before he made his way to her, and said in a low tone, that no one but she could hear, "I am come to apologize most humbly for having offended you the other night at the Guards' Ball. Can you forgive me? I never intended to annoy you, and have been so angry with myself ever since."

She raised her eyes to his face a little mistrustfully; somehow she couldn't quite bring herself to believe in this man, but the whole expression of his countenance was so penitent and earnest that her prejudices vanished, and she answered,


"I did feel very much vexed, but I daresay it was all a mistake; therefore I'll try to think no more about it."

They danced together then, and Houston was so pleasant, so agreeable, so deferential in his manner, that Cecil began almost to like him, and was quite sorry they had ever got on badly together. The Colonel used his eyes also to some purpose that evening, and remarked that, though Anstruther never asked her to dance, his looks followed her everywhere; and once or twice he fancied he caught her looking in that direction, when she thought herself unobserved. "There's something up between those two," he said; "but before I take any steps I must make sure."

With this intention he watched more nar-

rowly, and presently observed the expression of Anstruther's face change, as though a sudden and mortal pang shot through him, whilst he turned away his head with an effort from the direction in which he had been gazing; then in a minute or two he looked again slowly, and as though moved to do so by a power stronger than his own will. Houston, following the direction of his junior's eyes, saw Cecil talking with Villars. She looked anxious and ill at ease, and cast hurried, furtive glances in Anstruther's direction.

"The Captain is jealous of that boy—more fool he," thought the Colonel; "and she knows he is jealous, and doesn't like to displease him, yet can't tell what to do exactly. This is a strange state of affairs; but I'll see if I shall be able to put a little order into it before long. I don't think Villars is a bit dangerous; he's too young, and she only looks upon him as a kind of brother, so I'll not trouble my head about him; but I fear she likes that fellow Anstruther, and as long



as he's here I shall have no chance. He must go, that's all. He'll want a little bullying to make him stir, but I've no doubt I'll be able to get rid of him before long."

Next day at mess an opportunity occurred for beginning the bullying system, necessary, according to the Colonel, for moving Anstruther. It happened thus. Houston, for his own reasons, was anxious to turn their conversation on the little Queen, and began his advances by joining in some talk going on about the last night's ball.

"Those two Beresford girls are very pleasant and good-natured," he said; "everyone likes them, and they go out everywhere. I thought the eldest well got up last night too, though none could be compared in that way with little Leveston. She is pretty; it's a great pity her tone should be spoilt by living so much in gentlemen's society."

"I can't see that her tone is spoilt at all," answered Anstruther, some way down the table; "and if the men she associates with

are gentlemen, I don't see how they can harm her."

"Ah! is that your opinion, Captain Anstruther? I'm sure it is a valuable one, but I wasn't asking for it just now; my remark was addressed to Captain Brabazon," answered Houston, with a perceptible sneer.

Anstruther looked at him with both astonishment and indignation visible on his face, then he replied,

"I should not have spoken, only I imagined your remark was addressed to the table generally."

"You were mistaken, then. But it doesn't matter; when I am anxious for an opinion on any subject, I shall know where to go for it." There was a dead silence for a minute or two after this speech, all being too much taken aback by the Colonel's disagreeable tone and manner to be able to start a fresh topic at once. Before any one could do so, Houston resumed the subject: "That little Leveston goes out a great deal, and is immensely called on and noticed; much more

so than the officers' wives. Mrs. Tennant was complaining to me the other day that hardly anyone had been to see her."

Paget looked up quietly. "I'll tell you why, if I may speak—but perhaps you weren't addressing me." A suppressed smile went round, as the Colonel answered, very much put out.

"Oh! yes, tell us by all means. I have no objection to a remark that is not meant for a particular individual being answered by anyone."

"Well, you see," answered Paget slowly, as if half asleep, and not caring to awaken for his auditor, "some ladies tried on neglecting her once, and they found none of us would come without our Queen, so they were glad enough then to pay their court to her. Not that that has ever been the case here. I think she had letters of introduction to people in Dublin."

"Yes," chimed in Brabazon, "that is a good story they tell of her at Poonah—it was when she was about fifteen, I think. Some grand

lady there was giving a ball, and wanted us very much to honour it with our presence. She had never called on Cecil, or indeed on any other lady in the regiment, which didn't prevent her sending the little Queen an invitation, in which she expressed herself sorry that she had not called, owing to her being unable to walk up the barrack stairs. Our Queen is a proud little puss, as you all know; so, though she laughed heartily over the note, and showed it to us all as a good joke, yet she resolved to pay the lady out in her own coin. She therefore wrote a reply, saying she regretted very much that she could not accept Mrs. So and So's kind invitation, as she was unable to walk down the barrack stairs. I say the old dowager's face must have been glorious when she received that answer, and found, moreover, we none of us would appear. She was not very long in finding her way up the barrack stairs after that, and didn't appear to experience any ill effects from the exertion, except that I think her temper was rather ruffled at having to eat humble pie in that way; for it appeared

she could not at all get on without the military at her entertainments, having a large share of the feminine liking for a redcoat."

"I didn't fancy your little lady was so particular as all that," answered Houston. "I wonder would she do the same now?"

"Yes, certainly, if she was treated in the same manner," replied Paget. "Keeps up the dignity of the regiment."

"I doubt it; she is heart and soul wrapped up in gaiety, and would bear any amount of snubbing sooner than lose a ball."

Anstruther glanced up quickly as though about to speak, but thought better of it, and looked down again. Houston saw his movement, however, and went on, determined to provoke him into interrupting.

"There's nothing more despicable than a toadying spirit, that'll eat any amount of dirt, and put up with any indignity, sooner than lose the opportunity of an invitation; and I think Miss Leveston has not a little of that nature. If she ever acted as you describe, it was under pressure from her father, or some one else.



However charming she may be, no one can assert she shows any nobleness of character."

"I can and do assert it!" answered Anstruther, springing to his feet, and pushing his chair back noisily; "and as I suppose I have again spoken when I was not addressed, I shall leave the room, for I will not sit and hear my friends aspersed in silence."

"Anstruther is right!" cried a chorus of subs, whom astonishment had, until then, kept silent; whilst some of the older fellows, more cautious than the rest, looked black, but contented themselves with muttering in undertones to each other, "Impudent beast! Better wait till we see what's coming next."

Colonel Houston looked round the table calmly. He had intended to annoy Anstruther, and provoke him into some breach of discipline, but had never wished to raise a storm amongst all his other subordinates. Prompt measures must be taken to restore order. Glancing round him, Houston perceived Villars half rising from his seat, as though about to follow Anstruther from the room.

"Sit down, Villars!" he called out, in a sufficiently commanding tone. "I hope because Captain Anstruther is so foolish as to be annoyed by a speech, in no way meant to offend, and for which, if it has caused annoyance, I apologise, and because he has so far forgotten himself as to behave badly to his superior officer, that you are not going to copy his example. I gave you credit for more good sense and knowledge of your position than to think of doing such a thing. And now, sir, perhaps you will tell me what all the commotion is about."

Villars coloured up to the roots of his hair, and looked down on the table to collect his ideas. He was too much excited to speak out his feelings, or those of others, very plainly; and he was almost too anxious that they should be made known, once and for all, so clearly that there should be no possibility of such a disagreeable scene again occurring—though, from what he knew of the Colonel, and had heard him say before, he guessed pretty surely that this was no accidental collision with the feelings of his subordinates. Whilst Villars stam-

mered and hesitated, and got more and more confused as to what he should say, and where he should begin, Houston, after a minute's pause, as though waiting for an answer, went on—

“It seems this disturbance is even more senseless than I could have supposed, since you have actually no reason to give for your very disrespectful excitement. I shall pass it over this once, though anything of the kind is extremely distasteful to me, but I beg nothing of the sort may be repeated in future.”

By this time, however, Villars had a little collected his ideas, and determined that the Colonel should not so completely place them in the wrong as he seemed about to succeed in doing, he began—

“I beg your pardon, Colonel, but as you asked me to speak before, I suppose I may do so now. Why I didn't answer you sooner was not because I had nothing to say on the subject, but because I had a good deal, and could not quite make up my mind where to begin.

The reason of Captain Anstruther's indignation, and of ours also, was the (allow me to say what I think, if I speak at all) unfair and disagreeable way in which you mentioned Miss Leveston, a young lady who, you are well aware, has been brought up in our regiment from childhood, and whom, as you well know, we hold in the highest possible esteem. We were aware that you had expressed disapprobation of our feeling for that young lady, and of the title we had bestowed on her, to testify to that regard. It was, therefore, almost impossible for us to avoid thinking that your remarks were intentional, when they took so personal and severe a form. Captain Anstruther saw the matter in that light, as did I, and also many others; therefore, feeling it impossible to sit by and hear a friend disparaged, whom he was not allowed to defend, he withdrew from the room, for fear he should be tempted to show his disapprobation in some more marked and disrespectful form."

"That will do: you have said enough, Villars, though I cannot help being a little curious

to know how Captain Anstruther could have been more disrespectful. However, we will pass over that, and to soothe all your wounded feelings, I will apologise for having expressed my opinion of your fair friend's character, which I did without any feeling of ill-will, or wish to annoy, but simply in an abstract manner, as I would speak of any other person that came under my notice. Indeed, to calm your minds, and satisfy you, with regard to the safety of your idol, I may as well tell you I admire that young lady extremely, and have no wish to press my original intention of persuading her father to exchange. I hope this acknowledgment will convince you I mean nothing bad of your Queen, and that in future a man may be allowed the right of free speech without raising such a disturbance as I witnessed just now."

"Very good," replied Paget, quietly, "but if you wish to keep the peace, I should advise you to avoid giving utterance to any such thoughts on that subject as those abstract remarks you favoured us with a minute ago."

Houston laughed, as he looked towards Paget and answered,

“I’ll try to take your advice.” But his laugh had even a more disagreeable expression than usual, and the worthy Major thought “That fellow will get himself and us into trouble some day.”

The rest of them settled down to their dinner again, but with such an expression on their countenances, and in so gloomy a manner, that even a stranger entering at that moment could not fail to perceive something very unusual had happened.

The Colonel’s apology, willingly given though it seemed to be, had failed to convince the minds of his auditors of his innocence of any offensive intention; whilst the praise awarded to Cecil was of a kind not calculated to please the ears of men as fastidious on her account as were those to whom he spoke.

The remainder of the dinner passed in a gloomy constrained silence, Houston trying to keep up a little conversation at his end of the table, to which the others didn’t seem at all to re-

spond; and at the far end nothing but black looks and undertoned observations greeted him, whenever he turned his glance in that direction.

A less bold or determined man than Houston would have been cowed by the storm he had called up, but it only made him more bent on his own way, and more resolved to have all those fellows under his thumb before long, by fair means or by foul.

"I'll soon teach them," he thought, "that I have the power to punish them for this sort of thing, and, if need be, kick them out of the Service, under some pretext or other. What a soft old fellow that Meredith must have been; he has always let them do exactly as they like, and they really are not aware the Colonel is their master. A month or two more, and we shall see a very different state of things here."

Dinner was over at last. Then they all dispersed in little knots and groups, taking different directions. It was easy to guess what subject furnished the staple of all their con-

versation, and many went to seek Anstruther and congratulate him on his spirited behaviour. But he was nowhere to be found, having, in truth, gone out for a long solitary walk, trying by active exertion to calm down the turmoil of his spirit.

Late in the evening a rumour ran through the barracks that Anstruther had been placed under arrest for disrespectful conduct to the Colonel at mess that day. This report was soon ascertained to be true. Anstruther was confined to quarters until further orders; and as there was a ball at the Castle that night, to which he, along with many of the others, had intended going, it was not difficult to discover the motive which prompted this step.

When Paget heard what had happened, he was already half dressed for the ball. Hurrying on the rest of his toilette anyhow, and even forgetting a rosebud he had begged from Cecil that afternoon, he set out for the Colonel's quarters, and obtaining admission, began the subject thus:



"I hope, Colonel, you won't be annoyed at my disturbing you again about this affair to-day, but I thought I understood you to say you pardoned us all for our indiscretion, or whatever it may be called, and wouldn't notice it any further. Wasn't I right?"

"Perfectly so," assented Houston. "What leads you to think I had altered my mind on that point?"

"Only this, that Anstruther has been ordered into arrest, which I was convinced was a mistake; and as this is the night of the Castle ball, I thought I had better let you know, and have the error corrected in time."


"Ah! there you see it is you who mistake. I pardoned all those young fellows who at least did not proceed so far in their unruly behaviour as Anstruther; but a man of his years and standing is a different thing, and his being so much the worst authorises me to make an example of him. He is a surly devil, and I am sure his absence from the Castle will not be regretted by any one."

"He is nothing of the sort," retorted Paget

hotly. "We all like him, though since his fall in India he has never been quite the same. Hurt himself internally, I should think; but if, as you say, you admire our Queen so much, and are anxious to please her, you had better let him go to the ball to-night. She will be very much disappointed not to see him."

"There I don't agree with you," answered Houston lazily, fastening a flower in his button-hole whilst speaking, as a finishing touch. "I'm sure she's only civil to him because she's known him so long, and perhaps has seen very few better than he; but it will all be different soon; and, besides, if she wants him, let her ask his pardon from me."

"She'd do it in a minute if she knew how he was placed," replied Paget; then he went on earnestly: "I wish you'd let me speak to you as a friend, Colonel. We've always got on so well together till now, it seems a pity the harmony of the regiment should be broken. If you could only manage to take this little hobby of ours good-humoured-



ly, as you would the goat of the 23rd, or the deer of those other fellows, all would go well. But if Anstruther is annoyed because of his defence of her, depend upon it a very disagreeable feeling will be raised amongst the young fellows, which you will find it hard to overcome afterwards. You are a young man to be in command of a regiment, and, perhaps, don't think how easy it is to raise men's ill feelings, and how difficult to smooth them down. I have seen a good deal of that, however, whilst roughing about the world, and if you don't mind taking a word of advice from one who is not so high in the service as yourself, though as old in years, I think you'll find it will bear acting upon."

"Upon my word, Paget," laughed Houston, "you've read me no end of a sermon, but I won't promise to act on it, as I intend to bring these fellows to order my own way. I bear you no ill-will, however, for having spoken up, and I'm sorry I can't oblige you about your friend. I suppose you're bound to

the ball too; will you take a seat with me?"

This Paget refused, and departed, grieved at the unsuccessful result of his errand, and divided between liking and disliking for his most incomprehensible commander. He had taken Paget's lecture so well, though it certainly was very presumptuous and forward, that the Major could not help feeling a kind of respect for one who listened to rebuke so patiently; but then he had equally persisted in a very rigorous and harsh measure, which prevented the esteem of his inferior rising to any very enthusiastic pitch.

He was obliged to attend the ball without Anstruther, however, and was pleased to see Villars giving Cecil a full, true, and particular account of all that had occurred, minus the real cause of the dispute having been herself, and only stating that it was some one they held in great esteem. That she guessed at once who that some one was, they could divine, from the brilliant flush that overspread her countenance; but they could not understand how dear the intelligence was to her,

proving, as it did, that cold and unjust as he might be before her, he was still ready to suffer in her cause, and maintain her dignity before all who might speak slightly of her.

Next day Anstruther was released, Houston saying he did not wish to be too severe on a first offence; but, rather unfortunately for his character for magnanimity, the sceptical young subs would assert he had confined Anstruther to quarters on purpose to prevent his attending the ball, because he was aware of the Captain's intention to be there, and only let him out when he knew there was nothing he cared for in prospect.

## CHAPTER IV

MISS BAXTER.

A DAY or two after this, the two married ladies, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Tennant, came to call on Cecil, she having already paid them a visit at their quarters. Mrs. Tennant's *pussée* face wore a more peevish expression even than was usual to it, while handsome blonde Mrs. Brown seemed languid, indifferent, and moped. The cause of their discontent soon became apparent, as they both complained bitterly of the dulness of the place, and the few people who had called on them. Cecil comforted them as well as she could, determining, in her good-natured little heart, that she would persuade some of her friends to take

be a match, no one for a moment supposing the girl would be fool enough to refuse so advantageous an offer. For the Colonel had by this time begun to play his little game, as he persuaded himself, though at times a kind of fear shot through him, as to whether he was not a little too much in earnest. He was indeed outwardly changed since he first joined. He attended all the little Queen's teas, addressed her by her title, like the others, and was far more devoted than they ever thought of being. Cecil found his attentions rather too much of a good thing; for he was always beside her, talking to her, and amusing her, when she would listen to him; when she was occupied with another, lingering near, listening to the conversation, scowling at the favoured individual, and watching her with a rapt intentness that made him quite regardless of the looks and remarks directed at him.

"I say, isn't it absurd the way Houston's going on about our little Queen?" said Villars to Anstruther one evening, as they were re-

turning from Leveston's house, where the Colonel's devotion had been of the most marked kind. "I don't know what he's up to, but you may be sure there's something wrong about it, as he isn't a man to go in *bona fide* for love or anything of that kind."

"How can you tell," asked Anstruther, a little amused at the young fellow beside him pronouncing so boldly on an older man's nature and capability for loving. "I should have said that, if he went in for anything of that kind at all, he would do it just in the way he seems to be doing with her: over head and ears, throwing caution, prudence, everything to the winds. And she will take him, too, I suppose if he asks her," he added bitterly.

"I don't think so," answered Villars bluntly; "our little Queen isn't a girl to be taken by riches or position; and with all his attentions, Houston has something sinister about him that repels confidence. Depend on it, though she can't keep him away from her, she doesn't half like him.



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It was very pleasant to Anstruther to hear her so well defended from his own suspicions, or at least would have been, had he not suddenly remembered that Villars was the man of all others whose intimacy with Cecil he most feared. And now he thought, no doubt Villars will not believe she can love the Colonel because he thinks she cares for him. He turned and left his companion abruptly as this thought passed through his mind; whilst Villars, taken quite aback by such a sudden leave-taking, strode on, thinking that "really there must be a screw loose about Anstruther somewhere, he is so very eccentric at times."

All this while, what Houston had begun in sport was becoming very serious earnest for him. He couldn't keep the sweet fair face of the little Leveston, as he designated her in his thoughts, ever away from him—her voice sounded continually in his ears; and yet sometimes, when a glimpse of the danger of his pastime flashed through his mind, he would turn away from the idea impatiently, saying,

"Bah! it's only my nature to be very persistent about anything I take up. I've been just as bad about other things before, so I needn't wonder or feel anxious because I am equally set upon this."

By degrees, however, he ceased thinking of the reason for which he had begun this amusement, and never reverted, either, to the finishing up he had planned for himself. Only two ideas seemed to occupy his mind—one being Cecil, the other hatred of Anstruther, and, along with him, of any man whom for a time he took it into his head to imagine she favoured.

The capriciousness and injustice roused by these feelings made him universally detested in the regiment. None could guess whom he would be down on next, or in what way the individual punished had offended. In strong contrast to this was his behaviour to Cecil. Then the man seemed transformed, even his disagreeable expression disappeared, and those who knew him best wondered at the change a minute or two would effect.

To her he tried to appear generous, frank, and openhearted, every action that came before her being carefully planned to create a favourable impression ; and, indeed, the nature of his feelings for her caused him, in her presence, to be for the time a much nobler and more love-worthy being than he really was. For true love—and however badly he may have acted, after-events compel us to acknowledge his was of the truest of its kind—ennobles and purifies the heart in which it takes up its abode, particularly when in the presence of the beloved. And so it was with the Colonel. He had been used to consider all women as soulless, heartless beings, fit for an hour's amusement, and then to be thrown aside for some other pursuit. That a woman could have noble aspirations, high and lofty thoughts, firm purpose, and unswerving will in pursuing the right, even to her own loss, with a clear comprehensive intellect, all united to a very rare and admirable beauty, would never have seemed to him possible until he met Cecil.

At first he thought as badly of her as of all others, and in that belief began his schemes for destroying her peace of mind and amusing himself; but before long he perceived that here was something different from what he had ever met before, or that, if he had ever met a character like it, he had passed it over without notice. It would have been well for him then if, seeing how different this young girl was from the fashionable women of his acquaintance, he had abandoned his project for the ruin of her peace of mind, and for his own selfish amusement. But such an act was very far from his thoughts. The increasing difficulty of the task only spurred him on, whilst the strange new feeling roused by the sweetness and strength of his intended victim's character grew stronger and stronger with every moment he spent in her presence.

It was at this time that he began to perceive failings and short-comings in himself he had never noticed before. Did she see them too? was the question always recurring to

his mind; and if she did, could she ever love him as he had determined she should, come what might. Then he knew he loved her, as he had never thought to care for living mortal, and would chide himself fiercely at times for his weakness and folly. For folly it surely was that he, the cynical, egotistical man of the world, should lose his head for this pretty, petted plaything of the regiment. He did not take into account, when thinking thus bitterly, that, almost child as she was, she possessed qualities rare at any time in the world, and that, when met with, cannot fail of exerting influence on those around.

Then he would try for a time to exercise his own strong will, that had so often helped him in positions of difficulty; but even it was weakened and enervated. He could not will to chase her from his thoughts; he could not will to see her no more; he could not will not to love her who he knew well had gained his whole heart, beyond hope of recovery or recall.

At last, after one or two struggles with what was stronger than himself, he made up his mind to fight against it no more. It was kismet. Why, then, should he not turn all his strength of mind and will to accomplish it? To win her—not as a toy to be thrown away, as he had once sought her, but as a jewel, to be won and worn, till death should tear it from him.

But there was Anstruther.—Houston felt instinctively he was in the way, and must be got rid of, by fair means or foul. Whatever might be the cause of estrangement at present between them, it was certain she liked him, though possibly her feelings might not have developed any further. Still the Colonel's anxious, troubled heart was filled with a fiery jealous pain whenever he saw her glance towards the handsome, gloomy captain, who had become more depressed than ever, since Houston joined the regiment. And, in truth, he had good cause for being sad. The Colonel was perpetually down on him, and



irritating him in numberless ways—very trying to a man of high spirit; whilst above all, his constant attentions to Cecil had a meaning and purpose in them, to Anstruther's eyes, that passed unnoticed by the others.

As for Cecil herself, she was at first greatly amused by Houston's devotion. It never struck her that it could be more than a sham respect to the title he ridiculed; so she laughed at him and it, accepted his attentions gaily, and never dreamed that any serious liking for herself could be at the bottom of all.

Thinking it a burlesque on her position, she fancied he would soon get tired of it; but as it still continued, she began, after a time, to take credit to herself for having removed the Colonel's scruples, and enrolled him among her friends. Full of this idea, she treated him with more cordiality than at first—talking to him without fear of ridicule, and allowing him to see more and more every day of her gentle, loveable, character and strong, though little cultivated intellect.

Then, as time passed on, and Houston at last began to acknowledge to himself that he could not—or would not, it was with him—live without her, she had settled into a warm liking for him, only at times shaken and disturbed by the news of capricious tyranny to those under him, when she would grieve at the flaw in her new friend's character, which rendered it impossible to think of him with the confiding trust she felt in Paget, Villars, and many more.

She hardly dared question him yet on any of the acts she heard complained of, though once or twice she had felt almost moved to try the effect of a remonstrance from her; but, fearing to make matters worse thereby, she would refrain, and meet him next time with a little more stiffness and constraint than usual. But for these tales that constantly reached her ears, Cecil would have liked him very much. In spite of them, she could not help feeling very grateful for his kindness to herself, and often stood up for him during his absence, whenever her

young friends, the subalterns, discussed him in her presence.

"Well!" cried Villars one day, when they had been having an animated discussion on him amongst a select circle of themselves round Cecil's tea-table, "we're going to give a ball, your Majesty, in the Exhibition Palace. It's expressly for your edification, so I hope your new ally will help us well with it, in return for your gallant defence of him. It's my belief he's a stingy beggar."

Cecil laughed.

"Thanks a thousand times for the ball, comrades; I know I shall enjoy dancing at it. And the Colonel will subscribe, you'll see. Will you think better of him if he does?"

"I don't know," answered Ainslie, who was leaning against the window in a thoughtful attitude. "He'll do it to please you, and if he pleases you that pleases him, you see, so I think he deserves no credit for it. What do you say, Leveston? You haven't given your opinion yet."

"I think," replied Leveston, laughing, "that you have no right to discuss your Colonel thus; and you, little one," he added, addressing Cecil, "are as bad as these young fellows for encouraging them. Let's change the subject."

So they dropped it for the time, but it was evident they thought the Colonel cared so little for them, and had so little desire to identify himself with their amusements, that but for his devotion to Cecil, and wish to please her, they would have had very little encouragement from him.

Villars, who was supposed to have an unlimited supply of brass in his composition, which had been much increased by his London and Dublin gaieties, and by a very fashionable indifferentism of demeanour he had adopted, was chosen to broach the subject of the intended ball at mess, and ask Houston's aid in getting it up.

Of course he exclaimed faintly against this, saying,

"Really I'm not up to bearding the lion in

his den in that matter. He'll sit on me, and squash me flat, with one of those cold looks of his. I'd never survive it."

"Oh! yes, you would," answered Ainslie. "You're just like one of those little India rubber balls, with a head on the top, you see children with; you put your hand on the top and squash them in, but no sooner is the pressure withdrawn than they spring up to their full height with a kind of triumphant screech. That's you, Villars, to the life; and if the Colonel tries to sit on you, I'll back you to jump up in his face, with a bound that will astonish him."

"Well," replied Villars, trying not to look pleased at the delicate compliment just paid him, "I'll do my best about the matter, and, if I fail, do you take it up and carry it through."

Accordingly, at mess that day, Villars, towards the close of the meal, when, as he whispered to Ainslie, the lion's appetite would be appeased, called out from the other end of the table,

"I say, Colonel, we want to get up a ball on a grand scale in honour of our Queen, as these Dublin people have been very kind in asking both her and us. Don't you think we ought?"

"I see no objection," answered Houston, rather stiffly, reflecting, as he spoke, that there was a provoking air of equality about this young man, and that he required to be put down a little. Besides he (Houston) would have liked to have originated the ball-idea himself, and now only two courses remained open to him, both of them not agreeable to his spirit. One was to assume a secondary position and follow in their lead; the other to set his face against the matter altogether, which would certainly be assuming a very prominent part, and would no doubt put an end to the project, but might also be obnoxious to Cecil, who either had heard, or would hear, all their plans, and what had happened to them.

There was still a third course which flashed through his mind as he uttered his short stiff

answer to Villars, and that was to try to assume the position of one who had been thinking over the matter some time, but had not considered the right opportunity for acting had arrived. That plan, by good management, might be made to do, and he would then naturally assume the leadership of affairs. So he continued—

“In fact, I have been thinking the matter over some time, but had almost decided it would be better to wait till nearer the end of the season. However, as you all seem to wish it to take place now, I have no doubt it will be as well, and shall be happy to assist you in every possible way. Where do you think of having it?”

“At the Exhibition Palace,” replied Villars, greatly delighted at his unlooked-for success; “we’ll give a very grand affair whilst we’re about it, and that’s the best place going for anything of that kind.”

“I thought so myself,” said Houston.

“When shall it be—Thursday week?”

“Oh no, not until this day fortnight; that’s

quite soon enough. We won't get all the invitations out till to-morrow evening at soonest," interrupted Brabazon, very much alarmed, for fear too short notice should be given.

"Then we must look over our visiting-list, and see who's to be asked, and who isn't. You'd better do that, Brabazon," continued the Colonel; and so they chatted away, as full of excitement and anxiety as if they had been a set of school-girls preparing for their first ball; only one dissenting voice to the general glee being heard—it was that of Paget, who muttered gloomily,

"Awful bore it will be; and I suppose I shan't be able to get a nap the whole evening, there are so many dowagers to be taken in to supper."

The day of the ball was fixed, the invitations were issued, the preparations were made, and the eventful night drew near. At one or two dances lately, Cecil had noticed a young lady whom she had seen before going out in London; and this stranger's appearance was so brilliant



and striking that she asked her partners several times who the unknown was. At length someone told her it was Lady Edythe Vavasour.

"She's a great London belle," he went on explaining, "and her father, Lord Mountfalcon, is a large landed proprietor in Ireland, and spends a good part of each Spring over here. They used to say in London that Houston, of your regiment, was very devoted to her; but I suppose he has got the sack, as I hardly ever see him go near her now."

So spoke Mr. George Pearce, a lieutenant in a line regiment, and a dandy of the first water, signifying to his partner, as he finished, a wish to take another turn of the waltz.

His mother and sister were particularly nice people, and had been kind to Cecil, so that she often danced with the young fellow, though caring little about him, despite the opinion of Dublin society in general, endorsed by most young ladies in particular, that he was the handsomest man at that time gracing the venerable and dirty city with his

presence. Rumour had it, too, that he was about to be married, but none knew anything quite certain on that head as yet; only, if he didn't get married he ought to, gossip said, or else what did he mean by spending so much time at the Beresfords?

But whilst Cecil was observing the Lady Edythe for her beauty, Lady Edythe had noticed the little Queen for far other reasons. That night of the Guards' Ball she remembered well, she had been so happy then, and Houston had seemed to love her. Since that time he had hardly been near her, and his manner was changed. She could not account for it, or exactly define the difference, but she felt it, and her spirits fell under the torture of anxiety and doubt.

Then this girl, lovely and innocent-faced as an angel, was always in his society (for Lady Edythe had found out all about her). He danced with her that last night once; she remembered asking her name of him afterwards; now he danced with her often, and when the dance was over, would retire to some quiet

corner, from which he could watch this child with the fairy figure, and radiant face, and Circean seductive grace, unobserved. Unobserved at least, as he thought, but, in reality, only too keenly and closely watched by eyes that laughed in answer to laughter around, whilst bitter tears scorched them, rising slowly one by one, and forced back by a spirit too proud to let them be seen. He was sought for through the gay and glittering throng by eyes that rained merry glances on admiring faces; whilst they ever looked onward and further at the same time, in search of a stern dark-looking man, who had been wont to meet her everywhere, whose admiration had been all the world to her, and for a renewal of the old intercourse with whom her soul hungered.

This girl had drawn him from her; she saw that even before others had perceived how deeply the Colonel was smitten; and yet, strange and incredible as it appeared to her who loved, this beauty who had power to attract appeared to care little for the admira-

tion she excited in the man who to the Lady Edythe, was a king amongst men.

There were many others, evidently, that this foolish, soulless child, Cecil Leveston, preferred to Colonel Houston; but for all that, as long as she smiled her gay careless smile on him, and danced with him now and then, he followed her with a pertinacity and devotion that raised wild jealous thoughts in the high-born beauty's breast.

"She doesn't care for him," she cried, as she unclasped her bracelets, after one of these weary evenings of heartburnings and watching. "She doesn't care for him; it would be nothing to her to give him up, Perhaps she will, she looks generous. Ah! if she knew all, she would not have the heart to draw him from me."

Therefore, she begged one of her partners (Brabazon it was) to introduce her to the Queen of the Regiment, laying her anxiety to know her on all she had heard about her great attractiveness and influence in the corps.

Cecil herself, who had several times noticed the Lady Edythe's eyes fixed on her with a curious expression, wondered at this introduction, and began to think something must be behind such an anxiety to make her acquaintance; because, although for a time brought near each other in Dublin, as a rule their paths in life lay far apart, and they could never be really intimate with each other.

The Lady Edythe did not obtain any opportunity of speaking to Cecil Leveston the night she was introduced, and met with no occasion to carry out her plan, at any of the morning parties they both attended, for some days; therefore, when the ball given by the —th Dragoons drew near, she determined in some way to take advantage of it, and come to an understanding with this young girl, whom she dreaded, whilst she could not help admiring her. Cecil, quite unconscious of all that was passing in Lady Edythe's breast, dressed for the evening without any of the pleasing flutter of anticipation she would formerly have felt on such an occasion, and when it was given in her honour too. How

royally she could have queened it once ! How gaily her laugh would have rung out, how brightly her soft eyes sparkled ! Now that was all passed ; she was quite different—not a butterfly child, to take her highest pleasure in flattery and admiration ; but a girl, a woman, with a tender sorrowful heart, longing to be understood by one who would not understand her.

Her ball-dress, a miracle of freshness and taste, excited no rapturous cry. Her own loveliness, when she stood dressed before the mirror, and her Irish maid cried heartily, “ Oh, but it’s you that are beautiful, Miss ! ” drew nothing more than the most careless glance from her. If anything had occurred at that minute to prevent her going, she would have taken off her finery as quietly and soberly as she had put it on, and with as little disappointment. She remarked it to herself, this change in her feelings, and muttered so low that even her maid could not catch the words, as she handed her young mistress her bouquet, fan, and gloves, “ Ah ! I don’t feel as I used

to do. When will it all be over, I wonder?"

Her father was waiting for her. On this occasion he consented to chaperon her, and they had to go early, that they might be there before the guests. Leveston looked proudly at his little daughter as she came and stood beside him, smiling up in his face; for life, and a habit of consideration for others, had taught her this lesson, that if she had a heavy heart, whilst those around were light and gay, the kindest thing to do, both for them and herself, would be to hide her grief, and meet them as they met her. Never to damp another's happiness with a sight of her own sorrow was her constant endeavour; and, moreover, it was not a grief that could be told to, or relieved by, any one. Therefore, as she stepped into the carriage that was to take them to the Palace, she put her sad thoughts aside, until she should be again alone, sighing a little, a quick, short sigh, that escaped her father's ear, as she thought that Gerald would be there, and yet that the sight of him could bring her no pleasure, so long as they were not friends.

All this time, whilst the —th Dragoons were getting into Dublin society, and being fêtés and asked about everywhere, Villars was amusing himself immensely. He had out-grown the painful stage of his passion for the beautiful Queen of the Regiment, his fierce, unreasonable, boy's love having turned into a very firm and settled manly friendship. His was not a nature to sigh long after the unattainable, and finding that to win his heart's desire was impossible, he very wisely determined to fix his desires elsewhere. Anything absurd or *outré* had a great fascination for his mirth-loving spirit, and any person laying claim to the reputation of an oddity might be sure of attracting his attention.

No sooner had he arrived in Dublin than he began a series of inquiries for Miss Baxter, the lady whose portrait he had seen in the Guards' album, requesting such of his friends as were up in Dublin society to point her out to him the first time an opportunity offered. Whoever knows Dublin, and Miss Baxter, may be quite sure he had not long to



wait, as she can be met anywhere that is anywhere, during the whole season, whether by day or night.

Everyone on this side the water knows Miss Baxter, but for those on the other side who mayn't, we will describe her. First, then, as Villars remarked once before, she is not in her *première jeunesse*; not that she thinks so, remember—her spirit is juvenile; still almost infantile, indeed, at times, in its enchanting playfulness, and she dresses quite as young as the wildest young thing out. Fair she is, with what was once a very fine figure, we are told, now falling off a little; and she finds dancing the fast dances rather more of a labour to her than it used to be, though she still keeps on at them, because, as she says, if she didn't she would soon lose all her partners.

She's clever too, for all her affectation of juvenility, and perhaps in nothing is she more so than in match-making. But then she has advantages that few people possess; and this is the reason all the young men are dying in love with her; and she would fain take pity on

some of them, only she knows that, if she did so, the rest would break their hearts. Her own is too tender to bear the thought of this, so when some eligible young *parti* has whispered in her ear the desire of his soul that she should become his wife, she turns it over in her mind for a minute or two, and then gently breaks the sad news to him, that circumstances, and twenty or thirty more of the handsomest and most desirable young men in Dublin, render it impossible for her to grant him his request; but she adds,

“Don’t be down-hearted. I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you. I have a friend who would just suit you. She has, or will have, five hundred a year fortune; she shall be yours. Call here to-morrow, and I’ll tell you more about it, and put you in the way of getting her.”

They do say that she was once very nearly sacrificing herself on the matrimonial altar, in the following way. Two young fellows of the —th agreed to mark their appreciation of her charms by both popping for her the same evening, and at the same ball. There was no rivalry

between them. Their high esteem for Miss Baxter's character shewed them clearly it would be no recommendation in her eyes if they quarrelled and injured each other for the sake of her *beaux yeux*. No, a much better and more amicable plan presented itself to them, which was this: they would propose by rank, the junior officer taking the lead. It is true that in doing this they made up their minds to be refused, it being so well known that, in consequence of the probable dangerous results to society, Miss Baxter would never consent to make anyone happy in that way. Though fore-doomed, as they thought, to disappointment, it seemed good to them to pay their tribute to her excellence, and they acted accordingly.

It was when the witching strains of the Juliet waltz were ringing through the ball-room that the ensign, leaning towards his partner in a devotional attitude, whispered,

"Dearest, will you be mine? You know the amount of an ensign's pay, and if you think we

can manage to live on it, with love in a cottage, let us do so and be happy."

Such was the imploring grace of his attitude, and such the depth of feeling in his tone, that tender-hearted Miss Baxter was moved. She reflected, and we know that she who reflects is lost. It takes a little from one's lofty ideal of her character to think that she was ever near deviating from her noble plan of sacrificing herself to society, but truth compels us to state that at this moment she mentally exclaimed,

"Why shouldn't I be happy with him? It will only add a brighter lustre to my glory for a time to see the lamentations and devastation my marriage will cause in the world. I have half a mind to engage myself at least; perhaps Dumbleton, seeing the prize about to be snatched from him, will then come forward. Besides, it will make this poor fellow so happy for a time; and when I get tired of it, I can back out of it. Yes, once again I must sacrifice myself for the happiness of others."

Having come to this conclusion, she turned sweetly towards her expectant partner, wait-

ing mournfully, yet eagerly, to be refused, and murmured,

“It shall be as you wish. I am yours; but your sudden avowal has so upset me, I think I should like to go to the refreshment-room, and get something to steady my nerves.”

Had a bomb-shell exploded at his feet, the young fellow could not have been more surprised and taken aback than at this unlooked for termination to his pop. What should he do? Should he run at once, exchange from his regiment, sail for foreign parts, and never see his betrothed again; or should he look the matter boldly in the face, offer her his arm, and escort her to the refreshment-room?”

After all, the last was the best idea, for he might there get something to support his failing courage, and enable him to devise some way of getting out of his difficulty.

They went in and took a little refreshment, and were very merry over it; Miss Baxter, amongst all her other charming and striking qualities, possessing a remarkable ap-

preciation of the good things of this life. Indeed, some unfeeling brute of a man, who could not recognise in this trait the refinement of her mind (it is only a refined and cultivated mind that can properly enjoy the shades and niceties of good cookery), had been heard to call her a greedy old glutton; at least it was whispered so, but we can hardly believe it.

Her nerves at length having regained their wonted composure, they returned to the ball-room, where her young betrothed turned her over to her chaperon, and went off to fulfil his other engagements, in very low spirits. He had not been gone long before the lieutenant came up and asked her to dance. She consented, and they went off together; but after a turn round the room her partner stopped in a window recess, and, handing her to a seat, bent over her, saying imploringly,

"Make me happy; I cannot live without you."

"Oh! but I can't," answered the lady, quickly enough this time; "I have just accept-

ed Mr. M——. Why weren't you a little sooner?"

"Accepted M——," gasped the lover with well-feigned despair; "why, he is only an ensign! Oh! dearest Julia, I have a shilling a day more pay than he; you cannot therefore think of taking him in preference to me?"

Miss Baxter mused again, whilst the eager young man thought within himself—

"I have her in a corner now—a shilling a day is a great inducement; besides the extra rank, and yet she can't break with him, so I'm safe. M——, poor devil, is to be pitied; I'm sorry for him."

His thoughts were interrupted by the voice of his lady-love.

"You are right," she said; "I hardly think it would be proper for a person like me, on whom the eyes of all the world are fastened, to take an ensign. Painful though the task will be to my tender feelings, and greatly as I dread the sight of his despair, I must break off with him; and Charlie, you who love me so well, shall be rewarded, for saving me

from committing a mistake through my foolish tender-heartedness, with my hand. I am yours for ever; and now, as I feel rather faint at the prospect of M——'s anguish when he hears of his disappointment, take me in to get a little supper. I think a glass of champagne might revive my spirits under these trying circumstances."

Poor B—— now bitterly repented his unkind effort to supplant his friend in the lady's affections, but it was too late for repentance, and there was no time for reflection; so he offered his arm and took the exhausted fair one in to supper, where she supported nature in such fashion as soon convinced him she was none of your milk-and-water misses, who keep up their vital energies with the wing of a chicken for dinner, and go over miles of ground in the dance under the strengthening influence of a spoonful of jelly. In fact, her feelings had not impaired her appetite; though she declared, on sitting down, she was too overcome to taste anything; and her betrothed, as he replenished her glass, and



hunted the table after rarities, thought despairingly,

“How could I ever have been such a fool? She will eat me out of house and home!”

He escaped at last, and returned moodily to barracks, where he found M—— had arrived before him. B—— went to his (M——’s) room, however, and found the unfortunate youth leaning gloomily on the table, smoking a short pipe. They condoled with each other, and turned over various plans for getting out of the scrape; for you see they felt as keenly as anyone else the great injustice they would be doing the world in general, should either of them appropriate its brightest ornament.

But, alas! in spite of their contrition for the mischief they were making, the fact remained the same—they had certainly proposed, and whichever she chose to take couldn’t well get out of it. To be sure, M—— felt pretty safe—the shilling extra had caused the scales to kick the beam in B——’s favour;

but until he was formally set free, he couldn't help feeling a little anxious.

Thus matters stood, and days wore on, the culprits moping together, and avoiding the fair one's home, though meeting her constantly at balls, and paying literally their *devours* to her there, she having so keen an appreciation of their worth as to like to spend that pleasantest part of the evening (supper-time) in their company; and, as she could not enjoy the society of both at the same time, she would return again and again to that *sanctum* of everything good for food, and drink too, with a pertinacity that would have astonished those who, not comprehending her thoughtful nature, might have given her credit for baser motives.

At length, about a fortnight after the two thoughtless young men had gained this prize, and so cruelly wronged the world at large, a note arrived at barracks for each of them. Anxiety had given a worn, faded appearance to their formerly merry faces, and increased the look of eagerness with which each tore open his missive.

They were together in the mess-room at the time, and no sooner had they glanced at the contents of their notes than, disregarding the presence of several brother officers, they threw themselves into each other's arms ; whilst poor M——, young, and unable to control his feelings, wept copiously, overcome by his sudden release, until B——, older and more self-contained, exclaimed, somewhat angrily,

“ There ! stop that snivelling, you're wetting me all over, and I haven't another coat to put on, if I hang this one out to dry.”

“ Oh ! oh ! oh ! ” sobbed M——, lifting up his head, which had been resting on his comrade's shoulder, and which, curiously enough, showed no traces of tears, though convulsed with what an ignorant person might have taken for laughter ; “ don't you think she's right, B——. Noble creature ! I quite agree with her, from my own feelings. I know how she would be missed.”

By this time a circle of curious brother officers had formed around the pair, eager to know the meaning of the scene. They were told all that

had occurred, and at the end of the recital Captain Porter exclaimed—


“That’s what has been making you two so down-hearted of late. Now, let’s hear the letters.”

“They are both exactly the same—she must have copied one from the other, so I’ll read mine,” said B——. “Here goes :—

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“My mind has been much troubled of late by the engagement into which I entered with you a few days ago. Believe me, I appreciate your character most highly, and shall ever like and esteem you. No personal considerations, indeed, influence me, in what I am about to say to you ; but, my friend, there are two grave objections to the happy fate we had arranged for ourselves, and these are : first, what the world would say and do, if I was to abandon it to its own resources, and selfishly devote myself to my own happiness. There are innumerable young men as deserving and amiable as you, that, were they

to hear of my engagement, would have no hope in this life left them, and who would be hurried by despair into an early grave. I cannot, perhaps, expect you to think of all this, but I must consider the many noble and influential families who would thus be obliged to curse the day when first they heard of Julia Baxter. That reason alone forbids our union; but, my friend, there is yet another. I have been reading an atrocious proverb somewhere that keeps ringing in my ears (excuse my quoting it), 'When poverty looks in at the door, love flies out at the window.' Now, my dear friend, I have grave doubts whether a lieutenant's pay would keep me in gloves for a whole year, much less in bonnets—certainly not in the two together; and then, what am I to do for the rest of my dress, not to speak of the grosser questions of food and drink? You must see how impossible it would be for me to run the risk of encountering poverty, even in your company. Had you 10,000*l.* a year, I might have taken pity on you, even at the risk of plunging the world into universal grief; but since this is not



the case, there is no excuse for my forgetting the feelings of my numberless adorers. Forgive me for the heart-break I am causing you, and believe me, ever your truly attached friend,

“JULIA BAXTER.

“P.S.—I know a young lady who would exactly suit you; she is pretty, and has a little money;—allow me to atone for the cruel blow I have inflicted on you, by introducing you to her.—Come to-morrow to my five o’clock tea, and you shall see her. J. B.”

“That Postscript is not in mine,” said M——, as B—— finished reading. “I’ll tell her she must find some one for me too; that’s to say if she’ll get me a girl with money.”

It was thus that the star of Dublin escaped being eclipsed in the night of matrimony; and this was the lady with whom Villars had struck up an acquaintance since his arrival, and by constant intercourse with whom he was cultivating his natural bent for impertinence and conceit.

There was another point about her deserving of mention, because it was very nearly exercising some influence on Cecil's future ; and that was a constant and very marked contempt for female society, except where it could be of use to her. Married ladies, therefore, she could tolerate, and even be friendly with ; but young ladies were antipathetic to her in the highest degree, and none more so than Cecil.

The —th had not been long in Dublin, before she made the acquaintance of the two married ladies, with whom she condoled, in no measured terms, on the inconvenience and injustice of having a chit of a girl the reigning power in the regiment.

"If I were you," she would say calmly to the two ladies, "I would make her commit herself some way ; get her into a scrape that should make her glad to avoid all who knew about it. Don't you think that's possible?"

"I'd like her to marry," answered Mrs. Brown, "but I shouldn't wish her to get into mischief."

"I don't care what happens to her," inter-

rupted Mrs. Tennant ; " she is a nuisance to me, and the sight of her spoils my pleasure anywhere. If we get a chance we'll have her out, but we must take our time ; and, above all, don't let the officers know what we want to do, or we'd get the worst of it."

So Villars, in happy ignorance of Miss Baxter's dislike to her who was still his favourite, though no longer his idol, amused himself vastly with the fair lady's eccentricities, and was to be seen pretty constantly calling at her house.



## CHAPTER V.

## MISS BAXTER'S PLOT.

THE night of the ball at last arrived, as we have said, and Cecil found herself overwhelmed by bouquets, some of them from people whose acquaintance she had made since she came to Ireland, but most of them from officers of the regiment; and amongst others, to her great amusement, was one from Colonel Houston. She laughed over it, but was really pleased too; it showed plainly he had overcome his prejudices, and that there was to be peace between them. Under these circumstances, and because there was no offering, as she remarked sadly, from the only one from whom she would have cared to have it, she determined to

take the Colonel's bouquet, as a sign that she accepted his friendly intentions, and had forgotten their old disagreement.

At the time she never imagined he loved her; the idea had not entered her head, and would have been put aside as most unnatural had it done so. She would have found it difficult to believe that their hard cynical Colonel could be touched by such a weakness; and she wore his present calmly, little thinking what wild feelings she was stirring up in his fierce passionate heart by so doing.

As said before, she felt no excitement in going to this ball, though it was given expressly for her, and was to be a very brilliant affair. It seemed to her as if the best part of her life, with her gay youthful fancies and high spirits, had slipped from her unawares, and left her with her bright young beauty unchanged, but her heart dead and cold, and her hopes withered.

Thus she felt when they drove to the palace, and even after they entered the brilliant scene; but in a little while, as she chatted with her old regimental friends, and the few guests

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that had already arrived, her spirits rose, and by the time the ball-room had filled, and the dancing began, she was forgetting all her griefs, with the natural thoughtlessness of youth, in enjoyment of the fairy scene before her.

During one of the first round dances which she had given to Houston, he had remarked her bouquet, and thanked her for doing him the honour of wearing it; and as he spoke his voice became softer, and his dark eyes looked down on her, with such passionate intensity that she, without knowing exactly why, felt uneasy, and was about to propose another turn round the room, when her glance fell on Villars, standing near, with Miss Beresford. They were resting after a flying tour of the room, and both seemed a little out of breath, but it was not that which attracted Cecil's attention. It seemed to her that Villars was *chaussé* in some very unusual manner, and turning to her partner, she exclaimed,

“Do, Colonel Houston, look at Villars; what has he got on his feet to-night?”

Houston looked.

"Some prank he's up to, I'm sure," he answered; "let's go and ask him. I say, Villars," he continued, as he came up, "what are you wearing in the shape of shoes to-night?"

Villars laughed, stooped down coolly, and, pulling off his shoe, held it up for inspection. It was a very pretty article indeed, black kid, with a rosette on the instep, and a high red heel. Altogether it gave one more the idea of being a lady's property than anything belonging to a gentleman. So Miss Beresford thought too, and she cried,

"Why, it is a lady's shoe, surely, Mr. Villars; how curious that I did not remark it before!"

"Well," answered Villars, taking the shoe from Houston, and putting it on again, "I'll tell you all about it. And first let me mention, I've won five pair of gloves by doing it. I was calling on Miss Baxter to-day—a regular tête-à-tête visit; her mother had the tic or something, so wasn't visible, and no one came in to disturb us. You know her way of re-

marking anything she admires about us (gentlemen, I mean—ladies she never admires); so I was hardly surprised when, in the middle of an interesting description of what she intended to wear to-night, she suddenly exclaimed,

“‘Oh! Mr. Villars, what a pretty foot you have! Do you know, really it is quite a model. How strange I have never noticed it before! It is almost as small as mine,” putting out her foot, very elaborately got up, and displaying it.

“Indeed I believe it was as a pretext for showing her new shoes she mentioned my feet at all. I thought that was her motive, and that it would be first-rate fun to take her down a peg or two, so I answered—

“‘Yes, it’s rather a neat foot, I flatter myself. I’ll bet you five pair of gloves I could wear those shoes you have on at the dance to-night.’

“‘Done!’ she cried, thinking herself sure of winning. Then, to make it more certain, she went on, ‘But, mind, you must dance in

them the whole evening, or else it don't count.'

"'All right,' I answered; 'do them up in paper, and I'll take them off on my car. Mind, it's for five pair.'

"So I went off with them, and here I am. She has already been inspecting me, and I don't think liked the prospect of having to fork out; but I intend to hold her to it, just to pay her for making personal remarks. Perhaps she'll be wiser in future."

"Well," said Houston, who was in high good-humour, and wished to appear very generous before Cecil, "I have half an idea I ought to be down on you, and haul you over the coals, for making such a guy of yourself. However, I'll pass it over this time; and really, though a little remarkable, they don't look bad."

Cecil, who had stood by, an amused but silent spectator of the scene, now said, as she moved away,

"You oughtn't to make such fun of that poor woman, Villars. I know you are always

following her about, on purpose to laugh at her."

The "poor woman" thus spoken of happened to be passing at the time, heard Cecil's words, and appropriated them to herself; with great justice certainly, though without any positive knowledge of their having been applied to her; and her dislike of the little Leveston, as she sometimes called Cecil, was thereby increased tenfold.

"I'll pay you out some day soon," she muttered to herself,—“you and that sneering Colonel, who was doing the polite to you. I'll make you two quarrel, and then he'll put you out of the regiment."

Colonel Houston was one of the few men she didn't like, because he always held himself aloof from her, and, though meeting her everywhere, had never been introduced to her or danced with her. Now, curiously enough, though she heard Villars accused of laughing at her, none of her anger fell upon him, and she danced just as gaily with him during the evening as though she knew nothing of the

sort ; while against Cecil her rage became greater the more she thought of the offence, and she determined the punishment should not be long delayed. But then Cecil was a woman, and, worse even than that, she was a very pretty young girl.

In the meantime, quite unconscious of the enmity she had excited, Cecil whirled off with Houston in that long sliding step affected by most good dancers, and which is one of the nearest approaches to flying permitted to mere mortals. The next time they stopped to rest, Lady Edythe Vavasour was beside them. Houston had spoken to her before that evening, but Cecil hadn't, and turned to shake hands, when, to her surprise, the usually calm beauty whispered in hurried, eager tones,

"Come with me to the cloak-room after this dance ; I want you to do something for me."

"Certainly," answered the young Queen, kindly, but wondering, at the same time, what was wanted of her, for the young lady's quiet eyes were sparkling now in a most unusual



manner, and her whole appearance was that of one determined to carry out some project, that is, notwithstanding her determination, repugnant to her natural feelings.

Cecil didn't trouble herself long about it. Houston was too attentive himself, and his curious manner demanded too much attention from her, to allow of her thoughts roaming elsewhere; so that it was not until she had finished the dance, and found the Lady Edythe awaiting her, near the place where she had first spoken to her, that she began seriously to wonder about the matter. They were near the cloak-room at the time, and, under pretence of pinning up Cecil's dress, which had got a little torn, retired there.

Four or five pair of officious hands were instantly at their service, and the dress being mended in a twinkling, they retired into a corner of the room, to pursue their conversation, without running the risk of being overheard.

"Miss Leveston," began the Lady Edythe,

after a short pause, during which she seemed to experience some difficulty in making up her mind to speak; "I hope you won't consider me very presuming for what I am about to say, but I don't like to see you running into danger without warning you."

Here she stopped, and appeared again unwilling, though determined to proceed. Cecil waited patiently; she didn't understand what it was all about, and could see no occasion for her to speak. After a few seconds' silence, Lady Edythe again went on—

"Might I ask whether you have known Colonel Houston long?"

"Only since he took command of our regiment, on its return to England," answered Cecil, feeling uncomfortable at being catechised, but still unable to guess what was coming.

"I thought so," replied the strange girl before her, becoming more excited, and gathering more assurance, as she approached the real object she had in view; "then, Miss Leveston, let me warn you against him. That man ad-

mires you, and his admiration is fatal to those on whom it falls. Whilst you remain unmoved he will love you, as he does now, and try every art to gain your affections; but once you have learned to listen for his step, and hang on his words, when your eye begins to sparkle at his approach, and the colour to rise in your cheek at his sight, then he will turn from you to some newer, though from you it can never be to a fairer face," she added, with a half sigh of involuntary admiration, "and leave you to break your heart in silence, or get over it as best you can, and as your nature will permit."

"But he does not care for me, and doesn't make love to me," answered Cecil, a little puzzled, and a little childishly, for the idea seemed absurd to her; indeed, with the exception of Villars, though meeting with love around her all her life, she had never been made love to. "Besides," she added, with a flash of womanly feeling, "I am safe—I don't love him, and shall never do so."

"You think so now," answered the other sadly, remembering, from her own experience,

how the coldest heart may by perseverance be moved; "but he will soon make you feel otherwise. No woman," she added with sudden energy, "can withstand that man, if he chooses she should love him; a mere mortal cannot resist him. I will tell you," she went on with sudden passion, "why I speak thus, and why I warn you. I was myself the proudest of the proud, cold and immoveable as an iceberg; many had worshipped me for my beauty, and when he came and loved me too, I was as indifferent to him at first as to all the rest. Little by little, however, he won on me; I began to think of him by day, and dream of him by night, all because he set himself to make me love him. I thought him the noblest and the best of men, and he made me believe he cared for me as I for him; but it was false, all false—the fond looks, the tender words, the watchful care, it was all a deception, put on to win me, for whom, when won, he cared no longer. When you came he left me, and sought you as he once did me; you, however strong you may think yourself

now, will have your peace destroyed as mine was, unless you are wise, and shun him in time. Let me save you from such a fate, and let the sad tale I have told you be at least of some avail in keeping you from falling into his snare."

"I thank you very gratefully, Lady Edythe," answered the little Queen, "for what I am sure you mean kindly, though I do not understand why you take so great an interest in me; but I have no fear of the Colonel's fascination, because," she added tenderly, with a half proud, half shy smile, "I have a safeguard."

"A safeguard," repeated Lady Edythe, wonderingly, and glancing at the blushing face of her companion, without comprehending what was revealed there; "you are never safe, I tell you, from that man. Oh!" she cried, with a low thrilling agony in her voice; "it isn't because I care for you I warn you thus; it is because I love him, and I want you to turn him from you, and send him back to me. I cannot draw him back myself, but if you will

help, it may be done. Will you help me? It is not a great sacrifice, one admirer, if you don't love him yet. But I fear you do—I fear you do.”

“You need not fear, indeed, Lady Edythe,” answered Cecil, taking the girl's trembling hand in hers; “I do not think he likes me as you imagine, and I care nothing for him; but I will avoid him, for your sake, as much as I can, without being remarkable; and in this, believe me, he can never win me, for the safeguard I spoke of is more powerful than you can imagine.”

She half smiled, half sighed as she said this, and thought of her own love, so hopeless yet so dear. She could not expose it even to this girl who had confided in her; she was far too proud in her way for that, and she thought a little scornfully of the high-born beauty, who, lacking power to keep that which she loved, could lower herself to beg it from another.

Sooner than do so, she thought she would let him go, and bear the loss as she might;

she would not degrade herself, by hopeless struggles, to retain a heart that constantly eluded her, follow it as she might. But though she loved well and truly, she had never been tried by seeing the one she worshipped straying from her, and following some newer flame; so that, after all, she was no judge of what a woman influenced by despair is capable.

Her promise given with this slight tinge of scorn, and a large admixture of kindness and sympathy, satisfied the poor troubled soul beside her, who overwhelmed her with thanks and caresses; and then they returned to the ball-room together,—one of them at least with a lighter heart than before the conference, the other with tender wistful eyes ranging through the crowd, to discover the familiar face she longed to see, and yet the sight of which added only to her secret trouble.

All that night, during the intervals between the dances, and even when talking, Miss Baxter's partners observed that she was *distracte* and absent, a rather unusual thing with her

when in male society, though not at all unfrequent whenever she found herself alone with the ladies. The fact was she was turning over in her mind how best to be revenged on "that impudent minx, Miss Leveston."

At last, during supper-time, an idea came into her head, which she felt sure might be brought into sufficiently good shape to cause the little lady a great deal of annoyance—probably lead her to commit herself in some way which the Colonel would not forgive, and which would ensure her expulsion. But to bring it into proper working order would require a little consultation with some one else. She therefore determined to take Mrs. Tennant into her confidence, and obtain the assistance she knew that lady would gladly render.

Having settled this project in her brain, Miss Baxter turned in to supper for the fourth time that evening, and did such ample justice to it as rejoiced her partner's heart, by affording him a pretext for a little more in-



dulgence in the good things before him than he would otherwise have felt entitled to. But, as he explained to one of his brother-officers afterwards, "You know I couldn't have allowed myself to be beaten by a lady,"

Next day, about the time when a cup of tea might be expected, Miss Baxter's carriage drew up at Mrs. Tennant's quarters. For a wonder, that lady had not gone out. As a rule, when she had no other entertainment in view, she attended the little Queen's levées—not from a wish to please her hostess, or do her honour, but to pick up any little bit of scandal or gossip she was able, and which she did as much by the eye as by the ear.

The two ladies shook hands cordially, and talked chit-chat for a minute or two; then the visitor, brimming over with her subject, turned the conversation into the channel she wished, and began:

"Oh! Mrs. Tennant, you really must help me in carrying out a plan I have in my head.

It is about that Leveston girl. I heard her saying something impertinent about me last night, and am determined to pay her out. Now, I have an idea, and I want, first of all, your opinion on it, then your help for its fulfilment."

"With all my heart," answered Mrs. Tenant, spitefully. "There's nothing I should like better than to give that girl a setting down. But we'd better not let Mrs. Brown know what we're doing; she's soft-hearted, and might spoil all at the last moment."

"Very well; I daresay you're right," replied the other. "Now, you see, my idea is this. She is great friends with the Colonel, or rather he with her, though he didn't like her at first, I've heard; but she doesn't care enough for him not to be very much put out if she thought he said anything disrespectful of her. If she believed it, ten to one she would be rude to him next time they met, or even refuse to admit him to her tea-table, which, I know, is a favourite resort of his; and he, immediately anything of the kind occurred,

would, if I know him right, bring pressure to bear on her father to get him out of the regiment, and so rid you of them both together. Now the thing is, how to make her quarrel with the Colonel. Do you think it can be done?"

"It could be done, of course," answered Mrs. Tennant meditatively, "if we could get her to believe he had said certain things of her. For you must know the girl is as proud as Lucifer, and as inflammable as gunpowder. But, then, the thing is, how to get her to believe that. We couldn't make him say what we want, I fear, even if we could make her overhear."

"Well, but a letter I was thinking of," put in Miss Baxter. "What do you say to a letter written by him to one of his friends, with plenty of his opinion of her in it. We could drop that in her house somewhere after the Colonel had been in it, and, by having her name on a part that showed, she would be drawn into reading it."

"I think not," replied Mrs. Tennant. "You

see, the girl has her own ideas of honour, and I am afraid, no matter what she saw in picking it up, she would look no further. Still, the plan is not a bad one, and I think, with a little change, would do. Couldn't we write her an anonymous letter, as if coming from some of her brother-officers who were too friendly to hear her abused, and too much in fear of the Colonel to warn her openly."

"The very thing! How clever of you!" cried Miss Baxter, rising and kissing her friend impulsively. "I think we ought to be able to draw up something that will cause her to give our fine Colonel the cold shoulder, and so get her into his black books. Besides, do you know, I'm not at all sorry to be able to spite him a little also."

"Well, a great many people don't like him, I believe," answered her friend, rising, and fetching ink and paper. "Now, let's see what we shall say. We must be very friendly, so that she may think it's that foolish cub Villars, or flirting Captain Brabazon, or some

other of her sworn allies. Let's see, this will do, I think :—

“ MY DEAR MISS LEVESTON,

“ It is with great regret I venture to trouble you, but my deep interest in your welfare, and the friendly relations that have always existed between us, embolden me to send you this brief warning, although I dare not sign myself, for fear of the contents becoming in any way known to the Colonel. Perhaps you are not aware that when he took command of the regiment, he expressed himself very strongly against your remaining in it ; stigmatising you as a coquette and a mercenary flirt, living on the look-out for some unwary cornet worth the trouble of catching. Latterly, as you probably know, he has abandoned his first plan of driving you out, by these and similar speeches, and, to all outward appearance, has become your devoted servant and admirer. It is precisely on account of this change, and to warn you against being deceived by it, that I now

write, it being well known to me that he is at present arranging a plan which, if he succeeds in carrying it out, will place you in very painful and equivocal circumstances. What that plan is, and what the circumstances which would attend its successful accomplishment, I dare not at present state; but to show you what his sentiments towards you are, it is only necessary to add that he has been heard to say that, ever since he joined, you have been manœuvring to catch him—a distinction for which he professed himself to have no fancy, as he did not desire for a wife a girl that had been flirted with and made love to by every fellow in the regiment, ever since she had been old enough to understand what flirting was. I might repeat many more of his speeches, some of them worse by far than that, but spare your feelings, and advise you strongly, as you value your peace and happiness, to avoid his presence in every possible way. Knowing how much we poor fellows are in the Colonel's power, I am sure you

will excuse my putting my name to this, for fear it should fall into his hands, or into those of any of his friends, in which case it would be all up with your

“Sincere friend and well-wisher.”

“That’ll do; don’t you think so?” cried Mrs. Tennant triumphantly, as she finished the rough draft of this precious document. “Now, which of us had better write it? Can you disguise your hand, or copy that of anyone else?”

“I’m afraid not,” answered Julia Baxter, shrinking back a little at the thought of proceeding to action; for she was a coward at heart, and though delighted to have devised so splendid a scheme for revenging herself, would rather her friend took all the risk of detection. Mrs. Tennant, however, who possessed a great power of imitation, now proceeded to dive into the recess of her card-basket, and from thence produced a letter of Anstruther’s in answer to an invitation. This she laid before her, and presently produced

a copy of the anonymous letter, in a hand which, though not resembling the pattern very closely, yet seemed certainly to have been penned by a man, and, in one or two important particulars, was sufficiently like the original to suggest the idea, if any one was inclined to entertain such a thought, that it had been written by Captain Anstruther.

"That will do, I think," she said, as she finished folding it up and directing it, still in the same feigned hand. Now we shall see a pretty explosion to-morrow. She will receive this letter in the morning, and I will go to her tea in the afternoon, when I am sure she will do something extraordinary. She is so fiery, and has been so little accustomed to anything disagreeable, that she always flares up on the spot."

"I wish I could go too," sighed Miss Baxter. "I shan't half feel as if I had my revenge, unless I see the quarrel. Do you think you could bring me?"

"Well, I shouldn't like to do so with any



one else, as they'd be inclined, perhaps, to think I was taking a liberty; but with that girl, and in our own regiment, I think I may venture; so be here at half-past four, and we'll go together."

The ladies then separated, quite pleased with their plot, and confident it would cause a tremendous shindy between the Colonel and the pet of the regiment. It was a very foolish escapade for Mrs. Tennant to indulge in, as she, knowing the feeling on the matter in the corps, must have been well aware that, if their machinations succeeded as they wished, the whole regiment would be in an uproar. It would then have been a stand-up battle between the Colonel alone on one side, and the pretty fragile girl, with every man amongst them rallied round her, on the other.

But they had forgotten one or two little points in Cecil's character and bringing up when they made their arrangements; amongst other things they had forgotten that she was heart and soul a lady, and, besides that,

being brought up with men, she had imbibed a few manly notions of honour and upright dealing that her sex are generally supposed to be deficient in.

Therefore, next morning when the little Queen received her letter, she read it first with a dark frown of disgust and aversion, then looked over it again, and burst into a merry fit of laughter.

“What a fool the creature who wrote this must think me! It wasn’t a man, either, did it, though the handwriting is meant for a man’s, and though it talks of being afraid of the Colonel. Let me see—it isn’t Lady Edythe trying to warn me off her lover; she is a lady, and has already done that honourably and openly. Then I see they have been trying to imitate Anstruther’s handwriting; as if he’d soil his fingers with such a production!” she added, tossing it contemptuously towards the fire; but, it falling short, she sprang after it again, and seizing it, went on, “No, I won’t do that; I have an idea some of my lady friends know something about this, and

they want me to quarrel with the Colonel. I'll keep it, and see if I can find them out. Perhaps the concocter may come to tea here to-day, to see whether I look put out. What fun! If I see any one I suspect won't I play them off? And I don't believe there's a word of truth in the latter part. I know he didn't like me at first, but *nous avons changé tout cela* by this time;" and she smiled a saucy smile of self-congratulation and triumph at her father as he entered the room that minute—a smile in which he, quiet and unobservant, noticed nothing different from the usual sweet one with which she greeted him every morning.

Late in the afternoon her guests began to pour in, and amongst the first appeared Miss Baxter, chaperoned by Mrs. Tennant. The latter lady apologised for bringing the fair Julia, who then explained that, having heard a great deal about Miss Leveston's teas, she had prevailed on her dear Amelia to bring her, feeling sure Miss Leveston would forgive the intrusion.

It was the first time Miss Baxter had ever spoken politely to the Queen of the Regiment, who thereupon drew a conclusion from the sudden sweetness.

"That pair did it," she mused, watching them as they seated themselves together, near enough to their hostess to hear all she said. "They are the culprits, and they have come to see how I take it, and how I shall receive the Colonel. Won't I surprise them, that's all!" And, with a suppressed smile, she turned and chatted with the two guilty ones in a gay rattling manner, and with a sweetness only equalled by their own.

They didn't know what to make of it. Had she received the letter, or had she not? She seemed quite at her ease in any case; only now and then the two watchers could perceive that she turned quickly to the door whenever it opened, and a look as if the person who entered was not the one she wished for crossed her face, as guest after guest arrived, and still Colonel Houston did not make his appearance.

"How intensely provoking it will be if he doesn't come!" whispered Miss Baxter aside to Mrs Tennant. "She's on the look out for him, you can see."

The whisper was low, but all Cecil's senses were on the *qui vive*, and she thought she caught enough to satisfy her, if she had been at all inclined to be doubtful—which she wasn't.

A few minutes after this, Houston came in, just as Cecil was pouring out tea for Miss Baxter; for she eschewed the fashionable method of having tea handed round, and preferred doing the business herself—an innovation greatly admired by all her male friends. As he entered, she nodded to him, her hands being taken up with the tea-things; and when he came near she said, in a low voice that he only caught,

"Stay here by me, till I have done pouring out the tea; I want to show you something."

He stood by her, of course, after that, in a kind of paradise. She had desired his society—a thing she had never done before—though she

had had plenty of it, no doubt. Then the smile with which she turned to him, as she uttered the words, and the little sentence all to himself, and meant for no other ears but his—these things seemed to him special marks of distinction. He felt as if all the rest were observing and envying him; and that alone was grateful to a haughty, proud nature like his, even if he had not been as deeply in love as he was. The tea was dispensed at last, and then Cecil, whilst glancing round, to see that none had been neglected, drew from her pocket a letter which she handed to the Colonel, saying simply, "Read that."

He put down his cup, and began to read. As his eyes glanced over the paper, a dark red flush mounted slowly over his whole face—even up to the roots of his hair; and when he had finished, he folded the missive carefully, placed it in its envelope, and handed it back to Cecil, before he spoke; then he said very briefly, but with a passionate look, in which gratitude to her and rage to his maligners mingled,

"Thanks. It was very good of you to show

me this. I think I know who wrote it; the hand-writing seems familiar."

"It was a shame, wasn't it," she answered, looking up at him with her sweet frank eyes; "but don't judge by the hand-writing—that is copied. I know the delinquents, and could cover them with confusion this minute, only I don't like to be so ill-natured before everyone. When they are leaving, however, I shall let them know." She glanced as she spoke quietly at the two ladies, who were watching the conference with anxious eyes. They had seen that she had shown him the letter, to their intense chagrin and disappointment. What followed they could not hear, as the conversation was carried on in a low tone; but they could not help observing that those between whom they had intended to make mischief were certainly on more friendly terms than they had ever been before.

Yes, that was really the case; for after the few words relative to the letter had been spoken, Houston drew a chair near Cecil, and sitting down, began to talk to her with more vivacity

and spirit than he generally displayed ; for though a clever, intelligent man, he was not usually a great talker. Just then Cecil remembering her promise to Lady Edythe, to avoid his society, felt guilty and uncomfortable as she listened to his cheerful conversation, and saw more plainly than she had yet noticed it, that he desired to be kind to her, and make much of her, before those who had tried to get her into trouble. Of course she knew it was because he was grateful for her not having believed those slanders (so she told herself), but she would much rather he had shown his gratitude by acting in some other way, for, independent of her promise to Lady Edythe, there was Anstruther talking to her father, not far off, and he could not fail to remark Houston's eager *empresé* manner, without knowing the cause of it.

But she could not help it ; no matter whether Lady Edythe thought her unfaithful, or Anstruther flirting, she had done what she believed to be right ; if it had to be done over again she knew no better way of settling the



matter, and so she would put it away out of her mind as much as possible, and try to avoid the Colonel's too-pointed gratitude for the future.

She turned then, smiling, to Miss Baxter, with a little feminine arrow of harmless malice, ready to shoot at her, asking :

"How are you getting on? I hope the gentlemen are being attentive and amusing; but I needn't ask—that, I know, they always are with you. I hope you may be tempted to honour our little parties again with your presence, if this one pleases you. By-the-by, was your last cup of tea to your liking? Quite sweet enough, you're sure?"

This, delivered with a smiling air of the most perfect anxiety for her uninvited guest's comfort, was gall and wormwood to that lady, and she could have felt it in her heart to return for answer that the sweetest and strongest tea ever brewed would have been verjuice and vinegar to her after such a failure of her scheme. She was far too finished a woman of the world, however, either to say so, or to let her disappointment appear; and she smiled bland-

ly as she answered, "That Miss Leveston's levée (wasn't that the proper way to call it?) was quite charming, and she hoped often to make her appearance there again; which was really true, for Villars had been doing the devoted admirer to perfection, and as he had made some progress in the art of flirtation since we first made his acquaintance, his attentions were very grateful to her feelings.

Now, however, she rose to go, accompanied by Mrs. Tennant, who was intensely mortified at what she had seen; because she, being quick-witted in that kind of things, and knowing Cecil pretty well, was aware that not only had their plot failed, but that very likely it might rebound on their own heads, in a way that, to say the least of it, would be very disagreeable. To her quick eye, or perhaps it was only a guilty conscience made her so keen-sighted, it was easy to perceive that Cecil suspected them; and wily Mrs. Tennant guessed, by the glitter in her usually soft dark eye, that Cecil had a rod in pickle for them.

She wasn't far wrong in that conjecture ; for, whispering to Houston to remain where he was, and watch what would happen, she stood quietly waiting, as the two ladies rose and came towards her.

Miss Baxter was first, and when she held out her hand, the young girl's form seemed to dilate and become dignified, by the lofty scorn that animated her, until her air was truly queenly, as, pressing the letter into her visitor's hand, she said, in as playful a tone as she could put on, to veil the contempt that would flash from her eyes,

"Thanks so much, Miss Baxter and Mrs. Tennant, for the kind warning you sent ; it was really thoughtful, as I was quite taken in by this deceitful man " (throwing a lovely smile to the bewildered Colonel), "and should never have guessed he was acting a part, but for your friendly notice. You need not, however, be afraid of him, now he knows your names—I will make him promise to take no notice of the matter, since it was dictated by pure friendliness. Good-bye. I am so glad you enjoyed

yourself, Miss Baxter; I hope you did too, Mrs. Tennant, and that you will both soon honour me with another visit."

The two ladies, one of whom at least was wholly unprepared for this stroke, revealed plainly by their faces their guilt in the matter, and Miss Baxter, fairly astonished out of her presence of mind, could only gasp out,

"We did mean it as a friendly warning—indeed we did——"

What more she might have said was cut short by her friend administering a sly and sharp nip in the fleshy part of the arm, causing the end of her revelations to evaporate in a shrill little scream, that had the effect of drawing every one's attention to the group by the table.

"Julia's nerves are so upset by your curious brusque manner, Cecil," said Mrs. Tennant, stiffly, taking advantage of the pause, "that she doesn't know what she is saying. We haven't the least idea to what you are alluding, but if it is to the letter you have forced into this poor girl's hand, all I can say is

that the handwriting resembles that of Captain Anstruther."

"Take me away!—oh! take me away!" moaned Miss Baxter, sinking into a chair (there was no gentleman near, or she would have taken advantage of his shoulder), and closing her eyes affectedly.

This had the desired effect. Several gentlemen stepped forward, and offered the troubled fair one their arm to assist her to her carriage; and finally, after a few graceful efforts, she succeeded in overcoming her feelings, accepting Villars' proffered help, and departed, closely followed by her friend.

What they thought and said when they once again found themselves alone Cecil felt she could picture very well to herself. And so may you too, my reader, for the paroxysms of rage of two spiteful women are not pleasant to relate. It is sufficient to say that, though Miss Baxter always contrived to slip in a disparaging or injurious word of Cecil whenever she heard her name mentioned, she never again tried to play off any stratagem on her;

and the Queen's levées were, notwithstanding Villars' presence, never again graced by those two ladies.

In the meantime, whilst they were being escorted out of the house, Mrs. Brown slipped up from the other end of the room.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked in a low tone. "I thought Mrs. Tennant seemed very angry."

"I'd rather not tell any one," answered Cecil; "so please don't ask me. Only they hadn't been behaving quite as they should towards me, and they weren't pleased when I found them out."

"Very well; I daresay you're right," replied placid Mrs. Brown, preparing to leave.

She was not a bad kind of woman, and had a slight tendency to worship the rising sun; therefore she took Cecil's refusal to gratify her curiosity very quietly, and withdrew without showing annoyance, as many would have done.

As soon as she was out of the room, Houston said in a low tone,

“By Jove! how splendidly you caught those two! That scene was prime when the old cat began to excuse herself, and was cut short by the other one. But, do you know, all the same I’m sure Anstruther had a hand in it: that mean wretch the Tennant as good as said so. Betraying her own accomplice! Honourable, wasn’t it? I’ll do nothing to the lady, as you’ve promised for me, though I’d like greatly to have told her husband. How did he come to marry that woman? But I must find out if Captain Anstruther had a hand in it; and if he had, I won’t let it pass. A man who could join in a thing of that kind, should be kicked out of the service with the greatest possible expedition.”

“But he had nothing to do with it, I tell you,” she cried in great distress. “Oh! Colonel Houston, I know him well, ever since I was a child, and I tell you he would sooner cut off his right hand than lend himself to such a vile thing as this,” stooping down as she spoke and picking up the letter that Miss Baxter had let fall to the ground, when star-

tled by Mrs. Tennant's friendly application.

"You are very good to defend him so warmly," answered Houston, more stiffly than he had spoken since she showed him the note, "and he is very fortunate to have such an advocate. I would be well content," he went on passionately, "to be slandered and misunderstood by all the world, if only you thought well of me."

He gazed into her eyes as he spoke with a strange eager light in his own she had never observed there before, and a new expression overspreading his cold hard face, that seemed to transform him into another being. As she looked she wondered, then suddenly cast down her eyes, drew back and blushed; for she remembered so had Villars been changed when he spoke of his love in the ruined temple, and also Anstruther; but Anstruther's gaze was always different from the careless looks of those around. And now she feared the Lady Edythe's warning was true—that this man loved her, and, what was worse,



that he would take her act that day for encouragement.

And she was right in her supposition; for, though her sudden defence of Anstruther discouraged him, still her behaviour in the matter of that letter showed she did not believe it, and that she respected him. This it was that made so cool and patient a man as the Colonel nearly lose his head too early in the game, and commit himself before he had a chance of success.

The slight backward movement she made, however, warned him in time. Yet a little longer he must toil, and strive to remove obstacles; yet a little longer he must keep passion in bounds with an iron hand, and wait and be patient; a little longer he must look and long for the prize he coveted, silent and inert; then, when the day for action should come, he would rise and meet it, like a lion springing on his prey, or, better still, a brave determined man who has strength to bide his time.

He smiled carelessly after his fiery words,

as though he meant only a mere idle compliment; and she, in spite of her strongly-aroused fears, began to hope she might be mistaken, and that there was no harm done yet. When they were all gone, and she was sitting alone with her father, she said,

"I think, papa dear, Colonel Houston is better than we imagined. I don't dislike him at all now—indeed, I rather like him than otherwise."

"So I perceived," answered Leveston, a little drily. "You and he were as thick as possible over the tea-tray to-day. Certainly he is pleasanter than he was at first; but I can't quite reconcile myself to a kind of stiff reserve about him. There are many reserved men who still have a genial nature, and enter into other people's troubles, though they don't tell their own; but this man is both unsympathetic and impenetrable in no common degree, whilst keeping up the outward appearance of a good sort of fellow. In fact, to be brief, he is a man with two faces, and I can't like him. He's civil enough, too,

to me, which is more than he is to all the others, and he's sometimes very surly to Anstruther, which he has no right to be; for, without any exaggeration, there are not many better officers in the service than our friend Gerald, and I can't bear to see him sat upon by a fellow like that Houston."

"You're quite right, dear," answered Cecil, rising and kissing her father with much sudden energy, secretly wondering the while what could be the cause of Houston's dislike to their friend. We know it already, and since the scene that day, a slight misty idea of what might be the matter, began to form itself in the young Queen's brain; but you may be sure she kept it quite to herself, and left her father completely in the dark, as to what called forth this sudden outburst of affection.

## CHAPTER VI.

## PAGET'S STORY.

IN spite of Cecil's determined defence of her friend, or very likely because of it, the Colonel every day became more and more overbearing and tyrannical to Anstruther. He was strict, and a martinet with all, but his dislike to this one man in particular was so strongly marked that the whole regiment began to cry shame on him for it. Quietly and to themselves of course, for they were all a great deal too much afraid of him to dare say anything openly.

Parades and drills of every sort and kind were laid upon the unfortunate man; he was snubbed if he opened his mouth to speak, and sat upon if he didn't; all the work that could

be, was put upon him, so that now he had very little time to make an appearance at Leveston's, and was often many days without going there.

This the little Queen, though not generally imperious or exacting, remarked, and was nettled by it, imagining that, as she had prophesied, he had found some more potent attraction; and this, though she had foretold it, stung her, and drove her on to pay more attention to the flattering words of others than she should have done. Thus her intimacy with the Colonel increased; she began to feel her dislike lessen, and to consider him emphatically a good fellow. The others, seeing this, did not care to tell her the real state of the case, and it was at last an accidental question of her own that revealed to her the true position of affairs.

She had said to Ainslie, "How is it you all seem so stiff and ill at ease whenever Colonel Houston is here? I noticed the change in your manner just now, when he approached, and I think him so pleasant."

"No doubt," he replied; "but for all that Houston's a beast; and the way he treats that

poor devil, Anstruther, is too much for anyone to bear patiently."

"Why!" she cried excitedly, "I didn't know he used Anstruther badly. What does he do? what is it all about?"

"What he does is everything that can possibly annoy or goad a man into some indiscretion that may cost him his commission. What he does it for I can't tell, nor wiser heads than mine either. You may have noticed the poor fellow is never with us here lately, and that's the reason; he has not a minute to spare, and it's all the dirty, disagreeable work that is put on him, too."

"I saw he didn't come here often," she answered, looking down, and reproaching herself bitterly for the hard thoughts she had allowed to enter her heart about this man, who, it appeared, was suffering for her sake. For she knew well that but for her he would never remain in the regiment to be treated thus. Presently Ainslie went on—

"Why he stays I can't imagine; I am sure he might get an exchange on very good

terms, and anything would be preferable to the life he's now leading. And he bears it so nobly ! I usedn't to think much of Anstruther in that way ; I thought he was impatient and flighty, though great fun before he met with that accident out hunting ; since then he has been much more quiet and sedate than formerly ; still I should think he was just the man to strike work on being treated as he is being now, and it has quite surprised me the patient, uncomplaining way in which he takes the most unreasonable commands. I used to like him—I admire him now."

As Ainslie finished speaking, Cecil looked up with a kind of determination brightening up her face, which had been very grave before, as she answered—

"Thanks a thousand times for telling me. I wish you had let me know before, as I have been thinking our old friend was forgetting us ; whereas, if I had known, I should have pitied instead of blamed him. I am glad it is not he who has changed."

So saying she relapsed into silence, and a



few minutes after every one was gone. Then she began seriously to think the matter over, and the more she looked at it the more she blamed herself. She had been forgetting her promise to the Lady Edythe *in toto* lately, making a friend of the man that instinct and those around her warned her to avoid, and this was her punishment.

He was ill-using and making miserable the one for whom she would have given her life, and she could do nothing to stop the persecution, and save her friend out of his hands. Yes, on second thoughts she could, and, what was more, she was determined that she would. She knew the Colonel quite well enough to question him freely, without fear of his dark looks or cutting words, which, to say the truth, never fell on her, though she had seen them fall very sharply on those around. And perhaps, now she thought of it, it was this tenderness towards her, this marked partiality, that had led her to look favourably on him, and excuse many of his severe acts towards others, as necessary and justifiable. How mean she felt to



herself, as she laid this sin to her charge ; but she was determined it shouldn't be thus any longer. She would speak to him, find if possible in what way Anstruther had offended, and beg his pardon and forgiveness for the culprit. Nevertheless, when the opportunity arrived next day, Cecil felt very nervous, notwithstanding a great assumption of indifference, as she asked the Colonel carelessly, "Where was Anstruther?"

"Oh ! he's doing stables, I think," answered Houston, loftily, as though the man's name never came into his head, and he had some little difficulty in recollecting whom she meant.

"Yes," she went on, "I never see him here now ; and he is such an old friend, we miss him. Some one was telling me the other day he had a lot of extra work to do ; couldn't you manage to let him off a little of it now, to please me, Colonel?"

"The extra work he is doing now he deserves, and I can't let him off," answered Houston. "Of all the idle, careless, stupid, impertinent fellows I ever met, that friend of yours

(forgive me for saying so) is the worst, Miss Leveston. Of course I'd do anything in the world to please you, but I don't think it's in the range of possibility to do this. If I let conduct such as his go unpunished, the whole regiment would be as bad in a few days."

"Well, but what does he do?" asked Cecil, feeling, shrewdly, that nothing but general charges had been brought against him as yet, and that before she could believe evil of him, she would like some offence to be particularised and proved to her.

"Do?" answered the Colonel, a little at a loss to give a definite instance. "Well, you know, you young ladies don't understand this sort of thing—not what a soldier's duty consists in, so of course I couldn't explain to you; but he's a bad sort of fellow altogether, has no principle, and I feel sure will get into mischief some of these days."

"Now," replied Cecil, getting a little hot at this aspersion of the man she loved, and indignant at its evident falsehood, "you haven't brought one single proved charge against him ;

and that's not because I'm a girl, for you know, having been brought up in the regiment, I understand almost as much about the duty, and all that it entails, as any of you ; it is because you really can't bring out a good substantial offence, that will bear the daylight and a little reasoning on it, that you won't satisfy me. He may have annoyed you, no doubt ; still, to please me, as I said before, I must beg you to forgive his offences, and not keep him always on duty in future. You will do this for me, won't you ?" she said coaxingly, looking up in his face with her earnest hazel eyes.

He looked down on her half moodily, half pleased. If it had been for any other man he would have answered at once, "To hear is to obey ;" but this man, whom he disliked exactly in proportion as he knew he had ill-used him, and for whom he was convinced she pleaded through love—that was more than he could do ; unless—but no, he dared not ask that, though for a minute the wild idea had flashed through his mind, of entreating her to be his wife, and

making the granting of her request a kind of bribe to ensure his acceptance.

Even his courage, however, quailed at this proposal; though, as he looked at her sweet upturned face, pleading another man's cause with him, he felt how willingly he would endure all that his rival was now suffering, if he had the consolation of engaging her pity, he almost feared her love, as this man evidently did. "And I don't believe the fellow cares for her so much after all," he thought, trying to salve over his conscience for standing between them. "Besides, haven't I a right to fight my battle in my own way? All's fair in love and war has been the opinion of all ages, and a useful one it is to me; and, once for all, let me make her understand that I can't and won't help her friend."

"I am sorry to see you so interested in that man, Miss Leveston," he answered coldly; "because I cannot do as you ask. It distresses me to refuse you anything, and yet refuse this I must. I will not be harder on this very unruly soldier and troublesome officer than I can

help, but more than that I won't promise."

"Very well," she answered sadly. "I didn't think you'd have denied my request, and if you care to know it," she added, firing up and turning round on him, "you are the first man in the regiment that has ever refused me anything I have asked, in all the years I have been connected with it."

This stung him a little; he knew that as long as she thought of him as the only man who had mortified her by refusing her petitions, he should make very little ground in her favour; but even this he was prepared to bear, with the hope that when once he had got rid of his rival, which would be before long, he imagined, he might then begin to consult her, and grant her wishes on every subject on which she expressed any.

When he left, Cecil could not help boiling over with anger, and at dinner gave her opinion to her father very strongly, that "Colonel Houston was a mean brute."

"Strong language, darling," said the quiet Leveston with a smile that showed he did

not quite disapprove of his daughter's vehemence; "only I thought the other day you liked him so much."

"I didn't know what he was then, papa dear; but now I hear he treats poor Anstruther so badly, and that's the reason he's never here now. Did you know that?"

"Of course I did," her father replied; "and the fact of the matter is, we none of us can bear the man—he is the most tyrannical, upsetting, overbearing fellow I ever met in all my experience. The feeling against him grows stronger and stronger every day; so, though I say this to you, Cecil, I hope you won't mention it, or show your dislike, for it only wants a little more talking of, and fanning of the smouldering indignation in all our fellows' hearts, to make it burst into a blaze. And then there'd be the devil to pay, with all those young fellows up against their Colonel."

The same evening two or three of the younger officers came to Paget's quarters.


"I say, old fellow," began Villars, "we want

to have a chat here, and to get your help about a plan we're going to put in execution."

"All right," answered Paget. "I'll help you, if it's all on the square."

"Well, you see," cried Brabazon, who was one of them (a merry lively fellow, up to any lark going)—"you see it's that beast Houston: we must give him a setting down, it makes me quite rabid the way he goes on about that poor dog Anstruther; so we want to find out a plan for giving him a setting down, and making him look foolish if we can, without being ourselves hauled up for it."

"Yes, and I'll tell you how to do it," cried Ainslie. "You know how awfully fond he is of making us tell him everything. Couldn't we concoct some story that we knew would annoy him, then raise his curiosity about it, and make him order us to tell it. That would do, I think; if he thought there was anything concealed, he'd be sure to try to find it out."



"I see," said Paget; "I have an idea—just wait a minute till I think it over." Dull quiet Paget brightened up as he buried his hands in his short curly hair, and thought profoundly for a few minutes. Then looking up, "I have it!" he exclaimed. "Leave it to me, and I'll get a rise out of him at mess to-morrow. Mind, what you all have to do is this—ask me every two or three minutes what's the matter with me? All round the table it must be done, and especially at the end near the Colonel. He'll rise to the fly, I'll answer for it, queer fish as he is; but I won't tell you my plan till you hear it then."

"All right, old fellow; you're sure to bring it out well whatever it is," answered Brabazon; "but don't forget you have to do it. We'll remember to ask you often enough, 'What's the matter with you?'"

They left Paget then and went off, but he remained for some little time silent and abstracted, thinking over his plot; which at last seemed to arrange itself to his satis-



faction, for he brightened up and went out to amuse himself.

Next day, at mess, Paget was seen by those in the plot to be unusually grave; from this they concluded his plans were all ready, and that he was only waiting to be questioned, before launching out into his grievance, whatever that might be; for not knowing his scheme, the conspirators imagined, by the expression of his face, it must be a complaint of some sort he was about to make, with a view to drawing the Colonel out, and then turning the tables on him.

However that might be, Brabazon, who sat at the other side of the table, presently looked up and called out,

"Hulloa, Paget! what is the matter with you? You look so glum to-day."

"Oh! I'm all right, thank you," he replied, in a tone of profound melancholy, and trifling with his food, as one who has no heart to eat.

Brabazon turned away and went on with his conversation, but before long Villars, from

a little lower down, exclaimed, in a tone loud enough to be heard the whole length of the table,

"Just do look at Paget: one would think he had come from his grandmother's funeral. What's wrong, old fellow? Drink my health, and let's see if that'll cheer you up a-bit."

"Oh! it doesn't matter," Paget answered gloomily: "I don't want to mention what's troubling me, so pray don't talk of it."

Villars ceased his inquiries, but almost immediately after another took them up, and then another; after each successive inquiry Paget growing more and more miserable and solemn looking; and as they saw the Colonel's attention was being excited, those in the plot became more and more pleased secretly, though they dared not show it, for fear of their keen-witted senior finding out they were making fun of him.

After this had been going on a little time, Houston suddenly awoke to the consciousness that something very wrong must be

the matter with the major, who, besides being generally of a jovial countenance, was almost always a hearty eater, whereas to-day everything he took on his plate was sent away untouched. Turning towards him, therefore, with a quick decided action, Houston said,

"Come now, Paget, you may as well tell us what's wrong with you; for that something has happened we are all convinced."

Paget sighed, turned up his eyes, and replied faintly,

"Don't ask me, Colonel. Indeed I'd much rather not tell what it is that troubles me."

However, the Colonel was much too overbearing a man, and of too imperious a disposition, to allow anyone to keep a secret from him, if he became acquainted with its existence, and he went on—

"Nonsense, Paget we're all waiting to hear, and you must tell us."

"Well, if I must, I must, I suppose," he answered slowly; "but I don't like it."

"I insist on it, Major," replied the Colonel

with great emphasis. "It is a good thing for a regiment when its Colonel will listen to the troubles of the junior officers, and give them advice; and as I hope to be able to help you in this distress of yours, I must again desire you to tell me what is the matter, at once and plainly."

"I suppose I shall have to do so, then," said Paget with a groan; and after a short pause, during which he appeared trying to master some emotion which the Colonel and one or two more who were not in the secret took for grief, but which the initiated were profane enough to believe was laughter, he continued, "The fact is, Colonel, I am afraid you will think me very foolish when I tell you it's only a dream that's troubling me; but then, you see, it's not every fellow that has a dream like mine."

Here he paused, and looked as if he intended to say no more.

"Go on," said the Colonel, anxious to hear the dream that could have such an effect on the imperturbable Paget.

“Well, you see, Colonel, I don’t like to tell it,” he again remonstrated; “it isn’t a pleasant subject, but if you wish it I suppose I must, and this is what it was. I thought I was down in the place of lost souls—in hell, in fact; but not, you understand, sent there myself, it was only as if I came to look at what was going on; and though I could see the flames and the torments, I did not feel them; I was able to pass along, observing all that came under my eyes in safety. There are, so it seemed to me in my dream, degrees or gradations in the punishment of the lost, some being much more terribly tormented than others. Down through these several degrees I went, looking at and noticing them, till I came to the seventh and last, the most fearful, most appalling place of all; for there, in the midst of a lake of fire Satan sits, and his presence adds torture to the already fearful pangs of the lost. The scene was dreadful to me, and I was about to turn and leave, when I saw a soul I knew coming down, down, down, through these dreadful regions to its final place of abode.

I watched to see where it would stop, for, knowing it, I felt its appearance there a warning and lesson to me, and was anxious to see what its chastisement would be. But it came on—down, down, till it arrived in the blackest, hottest of all, where Satan had his throne. And as soon as he saw it enter, he rose, saying, ‘Welcome to my seat! Thousands of years I have been waiting for some one worse than I to take my place, but only in you have I yet found a fit representative.’ Then, with a malignant grin, the soul took its place, and the expression of its face was such, as it turned towards me, that I fled in terror, for fear it might inaugurate its reign by laying hands on me also.”

Here Paget ceased, and leaned, in a meditative attitude, on the table, as though lost in thought; whilst his companions in the plot chafed and fumed, saying to themselves, “How like Paget that is; he has forgotten entirely that we wanted to be down on the Colonel, and begins telling a stupid rigmarole instead.”

The Colonel, however, was determined to hear all, so he went on—

"Come now, Paget, as you have gone so far, pray finish. What was your friend's name when he inhabited this upper world?—for if that's his place in the next, we'd all like to avoid him."

"I don't wish to tell, Colonel, but I know you'll make me, and so I suppose it can't be helped; only if anybody's feelings are hurt when I specify, it's not my fault. I've done all I can to keep the name dark."

"Oh, hang feelings!" replied Houston. "No one can do anything to you for telling what you're ordered, and I order you to tell us immediately."

"Well, Colonel, I don't want to speak about it, but as you insist, and promise no notice shall be taken of it, I may as well have it over. It was—" Here he paused a minute, as though still anxious to hang back, whilst every ear round the table listened eagerly for the next words.

Finally, after just the proper amount of delay to ensure attention, he went on—"It was yourself."

A roar of laughter escaped from the listeners ;

they had been quite unprepared for this, and both the Colonel's face and Paget's were so good to look at, it was impossible for them to keep their countenances. Paget's visage was still long, sorrowful, and lugubrious. At times he would look up as if in reproach at the laughers around him, and at such times Villars would fall into more immoderate fits of merriment than before. For he said he saw Paget's eyes brimming over with suppressed fun; but if that was so, at any rate he managed to keep grave before the Colonel, who, on his side, seemed for a moment quite stunned at the *dénouement*; and though, after a few minutes, he tried to get up a grin, yet the attempt was ghastly, and turned presently into a vindictive glare on the laughing faces around the table. The sight of his angry look soon stopped their merriment; and then Houston was heard saying to Paget, with a feeble attempt at a smile,

"Dreams always go by contraries, you know; so from that I should say I have a better fate in store for me, than your story would at first lead one to believe."



"I hope so, Colonel," answered Paget quietly; "but, you see, it was a dreadful dream to have, and you can't wonder I was oppressed by it. I feel a great deal lighter and better now it's off my mind."

The Colonel tried to smile again, but it was a bad attempt; and soon after they separated, dinner being over. As they were leaving the room, however, Paget telegraphed to a number of the conspirators to come to his quarters presently; which they did, and found, to their astonishment, the table set out for a very substantial and pleasant supper.

"You see," Paget explained, "it was necessary I should eat no dinner, to show how great was my grief; but I had no idea of starving, so I took a snack beforehand, and we'll all turn in here later and have some rare fun. In the meantime, I want you to tell me did that do?"

"First-rate, old fellow—couldn't have been better," answered Ainslie. "I never saw any one so mad in my life as that fellow was to-night. He'd like to have eaten us without

pepper or salt the time we laughed, By Jove! it was good to see his face. Let's come to the stables; I want to see if they have bandaged Black Cap's leg, where he strained it the other day, and we can talk over your success as we go."

They walked off, a whole troop of them, accordingly, all under promise of returning late in the evening to do justice to Paget's supper; whilst Houston shut himself up moodily in his own quarters, with a cigar to console him, and wondered what that fellow meant by his confounded impudence; and the worst of it was, he could take no notice of the offence, for it was he had ordered the man to speak out.

In the meantime, Leveston had gone home and told Cecil. She could not help laughing over it, and said,

"I had no idea Paget had any sense of humour in him. He got up that story very cleverly, however."

"Oh! he's got more in him than you'd think," answered Leveston; but he's still so

simple and good-natured that he passes for less knowing than he really is."

The immediate result of this little anecdote was that Houston became more silent when in company with his brother-officers than he used to be, and that any attempt at laughing or chaff of any kind at mess was put down with the greatest vigour. His harshness to Anstruther, too, did not abate, indeed seemed, on the contrary, to increase, whilst his intercourse with Cecil was not nearly on so friendly a footing as it had been before. For she showed her displeasure at his refusal of her request in a very marked manner; it affording her a good reason for keeping him at arm's-length, as she had promised to the Lady Edythe.

Altogether Houston, Colonel though he was, was not happy, and would have been greatly to be pitied had he not brought his troubles on himself, and had he not evinced a disposition to become more unjust and tyrannical the more he perceived that those qualities made him an object of aversion. He

tried for a time to fall back on the society of Lady Edythe, and renew his old flirtation ; when she, though wasting away under his neglect, and almost broken-hearted, brightened up at this return of the truant, and for a time seemed likely to assert her old empire over him. It was only a delusive appearance, however ; he was too deeply in love with the little dark-eyed Queen of the Regiment to care even for speaking to any other woman, and, finding the fire of his old love would not return, he was very glad when the route came for the Curragh, and he was able to leave her, together with all painful remembrances, behind him.

As for Cecil, she was very pleased at the thought of their move. She had just got a very pretty horse, and enjoyed the prospect of the numberless delightful rides she would have over the breezy slopes of the Curragh, covered so luxuriantly in Spring-time with its mantle of golden gorse. She even thought she should be glad to get away from the round of Dublin gaiety—the balls, the drums,

the parties, of which she was beginning to be weary—and return for a time to the comparative quiet of her old regimental life.

They had not much packing to do, she and her father, but, he being required with his regiment, she went down under charge of Mrs. Brown, the other lady being still too ruffled at her detection to take any notice of the girl who had read her and baffled her.

The hut was comfortable, Cecil thought; and indeed she soon made it look very pretty and cosy, so that, in a day or two, they were as snug in their new quarters as they had been in their Dublin lodgings.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE RACES.

THE change to the Curragh was very pleasant to others besides Cecil; and the —th Dragoons had not been quartered there long before they began to get up some races between themselves and the other regiments in the camp. Of course Cecil knew a good deal about them from her friends, but did not hear who was to ride, or what was going on, till one day Villars called on her, and began the conversation by saying he wanted her very much to do something for him.

“What is it?” she asked. “Anything in my power, you know, I will do; but the fact is, in any matter connected with the race I don’t see how I can be of use.”

"Oh! but you can," he answered. "One of our races is to be ridden in costume; that is to say, we are supposed to dress up like ladies, and are meant to represent them. The imitation doesn't go further than the head, but we must all ride in bonnets, and what I want you to do is to run up to Dublin some day soon, and choose me a bonnet at Mrs. Manning's."

"Delightful!" cried Cecil. "I'll undertake the commission with the greatest pleasure, and will get you a love of a bonnet. But first you must tell me what colours you're wearing."

"I haven't decided yet," he answered. "That's another thing I want to ask you about. What do you think the prettiest?"

"It isn't a question of prettiest in colours this time," she replied. "You want to represent a lady, and of course would like to be thought pretty yourself in that character; therefore the question becomes changed to what is most becoming. Do you agree with me?"

"Yes, I suppose you are right," he laughed. "I should have no objection to being the belle of the race, so do with me as you like."

"Well, then, I should suggest blue and white," replied the little Queen, entering heart and soul, in a downright business-like manner, into the matter before her. "Let me see; what would you say to a white silk jacket, trimmed round the neck and sleeves with a broad band of blue, and piped up the seams with blue. You see it would never do to let the white come in contact with your skin, it would make you look so dreadfully sunburnt; but by putting the blue round the edge you will look quite fair. Then a blue scarf across your shoulder; indeed, I think, if it was made with very long ends, put over both shoulders and tied behind in a bow, to indicate a pelerine, it would look very well."

"First-rate!" cried Villars, enthusiastically. "And now, what about the bonnet?"

"Oh! that I can't settle till I see what Mrs. Manning has; but you must give me a pattern



of the coloured blue you want, before I go up; or stay, perhaps I had better choose the shade for you. I know what would be most suitable."

So that was settled for Villars; and then Cecil began to inquire a little about the other riders.

"Is Colonel Houston in the race?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed," he replied. "And the worst of it is, he has got a splendid mount; I don't think we've any of us a chance against him. It's a steel-grey, dappled, and jumps like a deer; he's a lightish weight is Houston, though he's tall, and a first-rate rider; has won no end of steeple-chases before. Then there's Brabazon's bay mare, Fidget; you've seen her, I know; a pretty thing she is too, but so hot that I doubt they'll ever get her to start right; and I could tell exactly what she'll do now—make the running at a splitting pace for the first few fields, then get pumped, and be seen no more in the race."

"You didn't tell me what you were rid-

ing," she asked. "Is it anything I've seen?"

"No, it's a new thing," he replied. "I must ride it up here to show you; for, to tell you the truth, I was going to ask you if you had any objection to my calling it Queen. I should like to do so, if you don't dislike the idea."

"Not at all," she laughed. "All out of our own circle will imagine the name is a tribute of respect to our gracious Sovereign Lady, and I who know better cannot help feeling flattered. But do tell me what she's like?"

"She's a brown-black, very pretty every way, and very good. If it wasn't for the Colonel's Blue Lightning, I'd be pretty sure she'd win; as it is, I think she'll take second place; but if you're betting, I should advise you to back the Colonel."

"Indeed I will not," she answered. "I suppose I shall be riding that day, but I will wear a necktie of your colours; and I must back the colours I wear, so do your best for me to win, I beg of you."

He laughed, promised to do all he knew,

and left. Next day Cecil went up to town, chose the colours and bonnet, which she brought with her; and on her return wrote Villars a note, begging him to call next day and try the bonnet on, as she was anxious to see how it looked. At the appointed time he appeared, a bonnet box was lying on the table, which being opened disclosed to view a triumph of millinery, in the shape of a white tulle bonnet, with a bunch of the loveliest blue forget-me-nots at one side, and a white marabout feather at the other. The lace lappets in front were fastened with a bunch of forget-me-nots, and there were narrow blue satin strings for tying behind. Villars, however, wisely felt that these without any back hair, would not keep on the bonnet, and therefore begged Cecil to sew in a piece of elastic, which, passing under his chin and behind his ears, would hold everything comfortably tight.

"It looks very pretty in front," she cried, "and is most becoming, but you must absolutely have a chignon behind, or the whole effect will be spoilt. We could sew it in

under this fall of lace, and join the lower end of it, by a strap of elastic, to the piece under your chin, which would prevent its moving or jumping up and down when you are galloping, as it otherwise would do. I'll write up to Dublin to-night for your chignon, if you like; and if you'll leave the bonnet with me, I'll put it in when it comes."

"A thousand thanks," he answered; "that will be spicy. I shall certainly be the belle of the course."

"Stay," she cried, interrupting him, "you must look your very best, and so must consent to wear a white tulle veil with that bonnet. You've no idea how it will improve your complexion. I am sure you will be fascinatingly pretty, and all the gentlemen on the course will be dying in love with you."

"Now you're only chaffing me, your Majesty; and if they do even, *en revanche* all the ladies will be saying, 'Conceited puppy! thinks he can cut us out in our own element, confound his impudence!'"

"No, no," cried Cecil, convulsed with laughter; "whatever they think they won't express themselves so strongly, so you're quite safe, as far as that goes. Tell me what does Colonel Houston wear?"

"Scarlet and gold," answered Villars promptly. "Awfully jolly colours! Don't you think so?"

"Jolly, no doubt," she answered; "and, in moderation, becoming to a dark man like the Colonel, but too startling to be very lady-like. The belle will have nothing to fear, in point of looks, from that rival."

"Then there's Brabazon, in green and white," he went on. "That's a pretty colour, and not too loud, I think."

"Very pretty for you or me," she replied; "but that man's as sallow as he can be. It won't improve his appearance, I can tell you."

"Well, what do you say to Meredith of the 14th? He's a handsome fellow, and wears white and pink; very well arranged, I believe, too."

"He would have been a rival, no doubt, and a formidable one," she laughed, "but for his whiskers. You know, however, as well as I do, he'll never consent to part with those ornaments; so no matter how sweet the pink and white bonnet may be, you'll have the pull over him there. Yes, I think I shall feel quite proud of my protégé. I mustn't forget, however, to write about the chignon."

Which she did, and got down, by return of post, a most magnificent plaited chignon, of a colour that matched Villars' hair exactly. This she proceeded to sew into the bonnet as described; so that when the young fellow next called, everything was ready for him, and he was instructed in the mystery of putting it on in the most becoming and lady-like style. The veil then being added, he was complete; and very well he looked too, as Cecil observed with considerable pride.

Next day the races were to come off, so, before leaving, Villars asked his lady if she would make a bet with him.

"Certainly," she answered, "if you'll let me back yours; but, as I said before, I won't bet against my colours."

"Oh! never mind that," he answered. "Blue Lightning's the ticket. I was looking at him to-day; he's as fit as a fiddle, and I don't think can be beaten."

"I don't care about that," replied Cecil loftily; "you back him, and I'll back the Queen—my own namesake too; I couldn't be so wicked as to bet against her. I can't afford more than half-a-dozen pair of gloves on a losing game, however, so that's all you'll get out of me."

"Well," he answered, laughing, "I'll lay two dozen to your half that Houston's nag will win. There's another very good horse in the race, too, that I didn't know of before. It's Anstruther's; he hasn't had it long, and has been so quiet about it that we none of us thought anything of it till I happened accidentally to see it taking its gallop yesterday. They say Anstruther is backing it tremendously; but then, no one having fancied it,

he can get long odds. After what I saw yesterday, I should say, however, it will run the Queen very tight, if it is as good a fencer as it is a galloper, and even Blue Lightning may find it troublesome. I say, if Houston was beaten by Anstruther, he'd die of it, I think."

"What's the animal's name?—what is it like?—and how is Anstruther dressed?" asked Cecil hurriedly. She looked a little troubled, and her companion, knowing what he did, divined that the cause of her uneasiness was the mention of the one she loved, who, as far as he could see, had behaved badly to her.

For seeing, as he couldn't help doing, that something was up between them, he, man-like, where he admired the woman himself, laid all the blame on the man, feeling confident that he, under the same circumstances, would have acted better. However, he answered the question quietly and fully.

"He's called Lucifer, and is a red chestnut, of great size and power—a regular



weight-carrier. A man like Anstruther requires a strong horse. His style of going is particularly good—brings his hind-legs well under him—goes well together—doesn't seem to fret or take anything out of himself, and doesn't go too high. Anstruther is a splendid rider, and will pilot him to the best advantage. These two, Blue Lightning and Lucifer, I am afraid of. The Queen could give a very good account of any of the rest, I know, so I don't care about them; but wish me well past the winning-post in front of these, if you please."

Cecil thought to herself that, in spite of the gloves, there was one she would be inclined to wish before him; only she didn't say so, and they separated, not to meet again till the next morning on the course, the young fellow sending for his bonnet-box immediately after.

The morning broke very favourably—a grey warm day, with promise of fleeting glimpses of sunshine later on, but not likely to be either very hot or very cold. About

half-past eleven Cecil's mare, Ladybird, a beautiful grey, not long purchased, made its appearance, when, she and her father mounting, they set off quietly for the race-course. It was very crowded when they arrived, for, besides all the troops in camp, there were numbers of people from Dublin, some of whom Cecil recognized as having been her partners in many a pleasant dance, and who, also, remembered her as "that pretty Miss Leveston, by Jove! —the belle of the last Dublin season, you know."

Houston was there, looking gorgeous enough for anything, but essentially not like a lady, only like a man dressed up, as Cecil had said, though he seemed quite satisfied with his appearance. As soon as the Queen of the Regiment came on the ground, she was surrounded by eager admirers, anxious to make bets with her, and from less interested motives on the subject of gain than is generally the case with bettors.

"Will you have a dozen pairs of gloves on something with me?" asked Houston,

coming up and laying his hand on the off crutch of her saddle. "See, you had better back mine, and I'll lay on some of the others."

"No, indeed," she answered, "I cannot do that. Anstruther," she said, turning to him, "I had backed Villars to win before I knew you were in the race, though, had I known, I would have preferred betting on an old friend; but now I'll back you against Colonel Houston; and mind you win my gloves for me," she added, smiling gaily at him.

He brightened up as Houston frowned, and said,

"I'll do my best, and I think you're pretty safe. Lucifer is one of the best horses I ever met; and, though the Colonel's is a good one too, I have faith in mine."

"So it seems," growled Houston. "They say you have backed him pretty steadily, and that if he wins you will gain a pot of money; whilst, owing to his not being very much liked by others, you can't be the worse if he loses."

"All the more reason for believing he's meant," laughed Anstruther, who was got up in black and silver; adding, as he walked away, "Don't be afraid of your gloves, Miss Leveston."

"Ain't you fellows going to finish putting on your toggery?" cried Ainslie, coming up at this minute; for Houston and Anstruther, though both in their jackets, had not yet donned their bonnets; "there's Villars has been dressing himself this half hour, and a most prodigious swell he is. I haven't seen his head gear yet, but he's got on, over his jacket, one of those scarves—what do ladies call them now? something beginning with a p."

"Pelerine, I suppose you mean," said Cecil. "I'm sure it will look very well. Why are you not riding, Ainslie?"

"I was to have ridden for Le Marchant of the Buffs, but his horse went lame yesterday when out exercising, so I have nothing to ride; my own horse is too slow a brute to put into a thing like this, and we mayn't enter our troopers. One of mine is a very good animal.

I'd have ridden him for lack of a better, if it hadn't been against regulations."

In the meanwhile Houston and Anstruther had gone to finish dressing, as the time for mounting drew near, and Cecil remained with her father, surrounded by busy flatterers, like flies around a honey-pot. For none of them did she care one straw, and had much rather been riding round the course, looking at the leaps, and mentally appraising their length and difficulty; but without absolute rudeness, it was hard to get away, so she remained, betting now and then on Villars and Anstruther; backing Villars to win, and Anstruther for second place, she having a kind of idea it was better not to desert her colours, after she had once declared for them, but to put her old friend next.

Hers was indeed a very novel and most lady-like style of betting. The horse went for nothing in her calculations. If she had seen a friend mounted on the most wretched screw possible to conceive, she would have backed him all the same; and one whom she didn't like, no

matter how well mounted, need never have hoped to obtain support from her.

In the meantime, in the dressing-room all was bustle and excitement. Villars, complete all except his bonnet, and confident of the beauty and comfort of that part of his attire, leaned lazily against the wall, with his arms crossed, watching the operations of others. Anstruther, in black and silver, with headdress to match, looked tolerably well, as far as colour went; the black suited him very well, but he, as well as most of the others, rejoiced in a luxuriant dark moustache, which had a very bad effect, and spoilt his whole appearance; also the want of a chignon was very sensibly felt when looking at him from behind.

The effect amused Villars so much that, safe in his own juvenility, he said languidly,

“Ain’t you fellows going to shave before you ride in those dresses. You look such fearful guys—bonnets and moustaches don’t do together, let me tell you.”

Houston darted an angry look at the speaker, from the place where he was trying to tie his refractory bonnet-strings.

"I'd not be like you, without one to boast of, whether it's becoming or not," he growled. "We don't spend our lives in these costumes, thank heaven!"

"No, I'm aware of that," answered Villars quietly; "but when you are doing the thing, it's better to do it well. You should have passed a rule that none but young fellows like Ainslie and me, whose beards have not grown, should have acted in this business."

To this Houston deigned no answer, but continued fumbling desperately with his ribbons, that were not improved thereby, and long before he had got matters arranged to his satisfaction the saddling bell rang, and all went trooping out to see their animals made ready. When they were gone, Villars staid behind for a minute, drew his head-gear out of its box, slipped it on as Cecil had directed, fastened on his tulle veil, and strolled out, with the proud consciousness that he was the best ap-

pointed rider there, and quite the *belle* of the course.

For one moment a pang of jealous rivalry shot through him as he beheld little Jemmy Delamere's get-up, but it passed off quickly; he had such a pull over everyone else, in the proud position of being the only chignon. It is true, Jemmy, the dandiest and smallest ensign in the Buffs, or indeed in the service at all, was perfectly irresistible, as long as you looked at him in front. He was dressed in white, in imitation of a bride, with orange and myrtle in the tiniest of bonnets, and blonde veil heightening the brilliancy of his youthful complexion. A bouquet of orange blossoms was fastened in the front of his jacket, which nearly caused Villars to die of despair, because he had not perfected himself by a similar decoration, until Jemmy, seeing him, came over with the easy good-nature that graceless young cub always maintains, even in his wildest escapades, and exclaimed,

"Why, what a swell you have turned out, to be sure! That chignon's a most artful idea, and



looks no end jolly. I feel quite bare without one, now I have seen yours," he went on, putting his hand up to the back of his head; "and besides, you know, I am sure that this arrangement will be off to the four winds at the first leap. I don't know how ladies keep them on. I say, Villars, what precious fools some of your fellows look! They've no right to ride a race of this kind, after their beards have grown. They should have left that for fellows such as you and I. However, the ladies won't look at them, that's one comfort. We'll be the favourites, you may be sure."

Soothed by this opinion on the advantage of a chignon, Villars went on to his steed with a calmer mind; and when the bell for mounting rang, sprang into his seat, resolved to do the best he could in the race, and, if possible, be winner there also. As he was about to ride out of the paddock, a man amongst the roughs in the crowd called out—

"Hulloa! you there in the blue bonnet, a fiver for a kiss, Miss."

"Done with you!" cried Villars, springing

from his horse ; and throwing the reins to a bystander, he ran forward to where the man stood, looking irresolute and frightened amongst the crowd. But when he saw the swell with whom he had so imprudently betted approaching, his courage failed him, or his fear of losing his money was too great, and turning tail, he slunk away through the crowd, amidst loud jeering and laughter; whilst Villars, seeing that to overtake him would be impossible, returned to his horse, pleased at the tribute paid to his appearance, and slightly out of breath with his exertions.

Past the stand they cantered, where their appearance excited no little amusement ; and soon they were all arranged in proper order at the starting-post. But here Brabazon's mare, Fidget, gave them no end of trouble ; she would either jump away before the time, or just as the start was given she'd buck round, and begin passaging in the opposite direction ; or when they were again all settled she'd kick at the animal next her, and throw them into confusion once more ; so that it was not until after six

or seven false starts, and when every one was beginning to lose patience, that they at last got off right, and sailed away over the first wall pretty well together. Here bonnets began to fly about in every direction, but there was no stopping for them, and on they all galloped, Fidget making the running, and, in spite of Brabazon's effort to hold her in, going at a tremendous pace, that everyone could see was too good to last.

Houston's grey, Blue Lightning, looked in tip-top condition, and at first was thought, from his splendid stride, even temper, and well-known capacity for staying, certain to win the race. He had been first favourite, because, though ridden in many steeplechases, he had never been beaten. Those who watched the race, therefore, saw with intense astonishment that, before the second field was passed, he was completely done up, and appeared with difficulty to struggle onward. Anstruther, who was riding beside him, noticed this, and glanced at the horse curiously once or twice; but he said nothing, and, as they

were approaching a fence, gathered his horse together to go at it. It was a deep ditch of water on both sides, with a high and rather narrow bank in the middle. Fidget, going at top speed, took it in her stride. Houston, feeling that his horse was, from some inexplicable cause, pumped, still never thought of flinching, but rode at it gamely. The noble brute, accustomed to carry his master in safety over everything, and never disputing his will, nerved himself for the leap, rose at it with trembling limbs and panting sides, but, touching the top of the bank with his knees, went head over heels into the ditch on the other side, his rider being flung over his head well on the opposite bank. Anstruther, following on Lucifer, topped the bank cleverly, but seeing the Colonel safe, rode on, working up his horse a little to overtake Fidget, who was still maintaining her lead, as though she meant to keep it. Villars on the Queen followed, and he, too, began creeping up, till he lay alongside Anstruther, when they both kept just behind

Brabazon, with their eyes fixed on his hot-tempered mare, in hopes that before long the pace must tell.

As they neared the next fence, a water-jump of about sixteen or seventeen feet, some one came up behind them at a thundering speed. It was little Jemmy Delamere, his bonnet falling off, and his veil fluttering in the breeze, but sitting well down, and sending his brown mare Coquette at the water with a speed that must carry her over if she held on. He glanced at Fidget as he passed her, and going down at the brook like lightning, flashed across and took up a quieter pace on the other side.

When Fidget, however, scented the water, her going became unsteady, and she began to shift a little from side to side, which Jemmy had remarked in passing, and from which he concluded she would baulk, and that, if she did, those two following her would very likely baulk also.

In this he was mistaken, however; for,

noticing these symptoms, Villars shot forward, and taking the Queen by the head, sent her at it with a will. She had never seen water before, and took a tremendous fly over it, when she found her momentum would not allow of her stopping, and that she was too well in hand to turn either to the right or to the left. Once on the other side, she crept up, and presently joined Jemmy Delamere.

In the meantime, Anstruther, still a little behind Brabazon, came down at the water without any misgivings, when, just as she should have risen, the bay mare swerved aside, right across Anstruther's track. He was balked completely, and turning back for a minute, came down at it again, and got over awkwardly, Lucifer slipping his hind feet on the edge, and recovering himself with difficulty. The others were now nearly a field ahead, and all the stragglers were coming up with him; but, knowing what his horse could do, the rider, never daunted, took hold of him, and sent him over the grass-field after the leaders at a pace that

presently began to overhaul them. They heard the thunder of hoofs behind, and glancing back, saw their opponent was formidable. They quickened their speed; but as they went over the next fence he was almost alongside, and in another minute joined them, easing his horse to their pace as he did so, in a manner that said very plainly he could have passed them if he would.

Presently Fidget, having at last crossed the water, rejoined them, but the effort to recover lost ground had told on her, and dark streams of sweat disfigured her glossy sides; still she was game for a little more, and the quieter pace at which she was now going would give her breathingtime before the final struggle. After all, of the four horses then together, it would have been hard to point out the winner, and all the riders held their course in silence, eyeing each other with grim, distrustful looks. Thus they went on well over four or five more fences, and now at last began to near the goal. Then Anstruther let out Lucifer, that

until now he had been riding well in hand, and darted to the front. He wasn't long alone, however, for Villars on the Queen, without any apparent effort, took up a place beside him, Brabazon and Delamere struggling forward a yard or two behind.

It was a big stone wall, loose but high, at least six feet, the last leap. As they went at it, Villars shot forward and flew over it like a bird, though it was evident the Queen was not good for another such effort. Anstruther followed, but his horse seemed to bungle somehow over it, and not clearing his hind feet, drew down a great portion of the wall after him, leaving a gap over which the two others hopped easily, though in all probability Fidget, at least, would never have got over the wall in its original state without coming to grief.

Lucifer's mistake gave Villars considerable advantage, and as he, being now only a few hundred yards from the winning-post, was beginning to ride his horse, he had already gained a long start, before the chestnut settled into his



stride, and laid himself down to recover lost ground. He seemed fresh enough to the anxious eyes that watched the race, but did not respond well when Anstruther tried to work him up, and loud cries began to ascend from the throng around, "The Queen has it! No! the chestnut's gaining! The Queen wins! Well done, Villars!" mingled with other shouts of a more mercenary character, the bets of sporting gentlemen in horsy garments who swarmed around. The chestnut gained certainly, slowly and surely, till, as they passed the winning-post, Lucifer's head was alongside the Queen's girths, she only winning by half a length; whilst close at their heels came in Jemmy Delamere and Brabazon, a very close third and fourth.

"Well done, Villars! Very well ridden!" cried his friends, congregating round the elated young man; "and after all," added Ainslie, "you deserved to win, for you are got up regardless of expense, and are the best representative of the ladies in the race." Then turning to Anstruther he went on, "That's a good nag of yours, only for that mistake at

the wall, he'd have won, and even as it was, another spring would have carried him past."

But though Ainslie thus tried to console Anstruther for his defeat, the general attention was centred on Villars, who by his get-up had won the hearts of the crowd, and amused his friends.

When the riders appeared at the stand, compliments and jests were showered on them in abundance, and whilst the winner was enjoying all this to the full, and paying back every laughing word with interest, Cecil, sitting a little apart on her grey, signed with her whip to Anstruther. He came to her, when she, leaning down close to him, whispered—"You could have won that, Anstruther; why didn't you?"

"Do you think so?" he answered, with a quiet smile. "You oughtn't to wish it; you'd have lost your bet if I had."

"Is that the reason?" she said reproachfully. "Don't you know it would have given me more pleasure to see you ride in first than to win all the gloves in the world?"

"I only know," he answered bitterly, "that if you speak to me in that way I shall go mad, and say something that will remind you of what you had decided it was best to forget. Forgive me if I leave you, but I cannot trust myself any longer in your company."

So saying, he turned and walked off, joining a group who had gathered round Houston and his horse as he made his appearance after his mishap.

It was clear that the horse had been drugged; and whoever had administered the dose was not a skilful hand, as the quantity had been too great to allow of the animal's indisposition being attributed to any other cause. There he stood, poor beast, turning his dull languid eye now and then on those around him, as though wondering whether they were about to give him any relief; whilst Houston, raging within, though outwardly calm and cool enough, except for a dark look in his eye, swore that he would never rest till he had traced the delinquent. And then he paused,

but the pause was even more emphatic than words, and told of cruel vengeance long and secretly nursed, bursting forth, when the time came, with savage fury on the criminal. Anstruther stood amongst the rest and looked on—first at the horse, which he pitied; then at the master, whom he disliked, feared, and despised. He is a dangerous man, he thought, as he watched the expression with which he announced his intention of hunting down the villain who had drugged his horse.

Later on in the day, after the races were over, and shortly before mess, Villars, returning from seeing his horse done up, met Anstruther, who had just been on the same errand. They joined company with each other, and began talking over the events of the day.

"I had a very close shave in winning," said Villars; "indeed, I can't help thinking that if you had done your best you must have won."

"The horse is a good one," answered the

other; "I think he is more than a match for your mare; but I didn't feel as up to riding as usual to-day. I daresay another time, if we give them a trial, I'll do better."

"Our little Queen placed them well," went on Villars. "I heard she backed you for second place, as she had already done me for first; but somehow I fancied she looked disappointed when you didn't win, though she made her gloves that way. She is a regular brick that girl. I heard her give it well to Houston the other day for something he said about you. Our Colonel didn't half like it, but as he had let himself in for the reproof, he had to bear it. She told him you would sooner cut off your right hand than stoop to the baseness of such a deed as that of which he accused you. An anonymous letter it was, or some such thing."

As Villars related all this, he glanced now and then furtively at his companion's face, to see what he felt. That Cecil loved this man, he was sure; but was there any return on his side? and if there was, why

didn't he show it? For the man himself he had little liking, though he tried thus to point out to him the prize that lay within his reach; but for her, whom he had worshipped, and now loved with a pure friendly affection, for her it was that he spoke thus, and tried to prepare the way for her happiness.

As he watched and spoke, he saw the bronzed forehead of the man beside him flush, his dark eyes soften, and his lip tremble. Only for a moment, did he betray those signs of emotion, and he heaved a short quick sigh as Villars finished speaking. It was evident, whatever separated them, it was not indifference on his part. Villars had hardly decided thus when the other spoke.

"I believe you are a good fellow, better than I have always tried to think. I wonder would it be right that I should tell you the origin of my dislike and mistrust for you?—or shall I let bygones be bygones, and put what is past out of sight and mind?"

"Tell me; I should like to hear all about it," answered Villars. "I know you haven't thought well of me—that one can always read in a person's looks and manners, but the reason of it I cannot tell, as I believe I have never stood in your way in anything. Stay," he added, as Anstruther was about to speak; "here is Miss Leveston coming. I must go for the present; the Colonel asked me to come and assist him in his investigations about the horse, and I have waited too long already. I'll see you in your rooms this evening, and tell you all we find out about it."

So speaking, he hurried off; whilst Anstruther walked on quickly to overtake Cecil, who was just returning from a cup of tea with Mrs. Brown, she and that lady having become much more friendly since the affair about the letter; the reason of the intimacy being that Mrs. Brown, having found out what had happened was so annoyed at not having been consulted that she determined Cecil should see she had no hand in the matter.

She thereupon became very kind, and took more notice of the girl than she had ever done before.

Now, as Cecil walked homewards, Anstruther overtook her, and entered into conversation.

"You were pleased with the races to-day?" he asked. "I am told you placed the horses correctly."

She looked up at him with a half sad, half amused look as she answered,

"I could not help myself. If I had known before you were going to ride, I should have backed you for the first place; and when I couldn't do that, of course I put you next. But remember I don't think I deserve any credit for my placing being correct; it was you who made it so, as, if I know anything of you and your riding, you could have won that easily."

He laughed a little nervously, and replied,

"You give me credit for too much generosity. Do you think I would let another man beat me if I could help it?"

"You did certainly this time," she answered. Oh, Anstruther!" she went on, "I thought



you had got over that foolish dream, but this shows me the contrary."

"I told you," he answered hoarsely, "I should never get over it. After all, what great thing is it to lose a miserable race like that, to pleasure one we love? You should not think so much of it."

"But I do think much of it," she replied, "more than I can say. I have seen enough of men and of life to know that love is deep indeed which will act as yours has done to-day. And though I am proud of it—as who would not be?" she added with glistening eyes—"it grieves me also, for all is worth so little when faith is wanting."

"Have patience with me a little longer," he begged; "it will come soon, this faith you think so necessary; I feel that it will, and I shall know why I have disbelieved and mistrusted you. Be kind to me now, love, for I feel as if something bad hung over me, and I want comfort; something I can think of, and that will give me courage when evil days come."

"You frighten me," she answered, "you look

so strange, and talk so miserably. Come what may, I will wait for you till your faith in me returns; and be the world ever so hard on you, or your fate ever so dark, think of me as a friend who loves you now, and will do so for ever."

"I believe you," he muttered, more to himself than to her. "I feel somehow my former suspicions were false; but I will have them all explained—then perhaps we may be happy."

By this time they had reached Leveston's door and separated, Anstruther resisting all entreaties to enter. He was too eager to go down and find out from Villars all about what had troubled him so long, to bear any delay, and even the thought of sitting with her and her father could not prevail on him to stay.

"When everything is right, as I feel it will be," he thought, "then I can return, confess how wrong I've been, and be forgiven." He had no doubt about the forgiveness; he knew well his love was too true-hearted a woman not to pardon any sin against herself, so long as she knew affection had caused it. He hurried down to Villars' quarters, whilst

Cecil remained absorbed in a happy dream, from which she tried to banish all doubts and fears that would intrude to disturb her bliss. Whatever the cloud had been that had overshadowed him, he was beginning to recover from its influence, so that she might hope again to enjoy in the future as happy days as she had enjoyed in the past. She could not understand his gloom when happiness seemed so near; as for her, she was as light-hearted as a lark, and could almost have counted the minutes until she should see him again.

In the meantime, Anstruther reached Villars' quarters, and went into his hut. He was not there, and the unexpected visitor had some difficulty in finding himself a seat; the whole place was so littered over with all the miscellaneous rubbish a subaltern contrives to collect when he has plenty of money—very often when he hasn't—and no necessity presents itself for controlling his inclinations. Boots in one place, pipes in another, regimentals thrown on one chair, an evening coat somewhere else, a surly-looking bull-terrier curled up in a corner, watch-

ing Anstruther out of its evil eye, and a bicycle propped up against the wall, upon which Villars was accustomed to disport himself, along all the most level roads in the neighbourhood, to the derision of the ladies, who will persist in calling this charming mode of progression ungraceful, and who sometimes maintain that the most sensible man in the world looks like a fool, or a spider on wheels, when mounted on one. Villars, however, didn't know this, or his devotion to appearances was quite sufficient to have induced his giving up his favourite recreation, had he been aware with what difficulty his fair friends smothered a laugh when they met him careering along on his iron steed. At any other time Anstruther would have derived amusement from inspecting the machine, and perhaps trying it, as he, in common with most of his brother-officers, was accustomed to consider it the perfection of elegance and convenience in the way of locomotion; but now his mind was too much pre-occupied, and he remained counting the minutes, and dreaming of happy days to

come, until Villars appeared, wearing a very grave, troubled face, when he perceived who the occupant of his tent was.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ANSTRUTHER IN TROUBLE.

VILLARS entered his hut looking very grave. We will relate what happened, when he joined the Colonel, and, in company with him and one or two others, proceeded to the stables in which Blue Lightning lived. The servant had witnessed the horse's failure, and knew pretty well to what that failure might be attributed, and the fuss it would occasion in the regiment. He had an idea, moreover, that his master would not allow him to escape punishment in the matter ; and when he saw the party of gentlemen walking down towards him, he turned pale, his knees trem-

bling so much that he seemed hardly able to stand.

Villars alone, less concerned in the matter than any of the rest, for—to tell the truth, he enjoyed the Colonel's annoyance—noticed this, and remembered it afterwards, with a feeling of bitter self-accusation that he hadn't pointed it out at the time. As it was, they went into the stable, and passed into the poor animal's loose box without saying a word. There was no trace of a scuffle between the horse and the man who had drugged him, no marks of anyone having forced an entrance into the place through windows or door. All was as it should be, and it was evident to the searchers that someone well acquainted with the stable, and who had free access to it, must be the delinquent.

"Marks," called Houston to his servant, when they had arrived at this conclusion, "did you see anyone about here last night? Think, and be certain of what you say, for I shall sift this matter to the bottom, and any accusations you make you must prove."

"I saw no one, sir," answered the man, touching his cap; "only one of the gentlemen coming to look at his horse that was in the race too, and that's put up in the next box, sir."

The man answered readily and openly, having recovered from his first fright; so that, even had they been inclined to suspect him, none of those present would have had any reason for doing so from his demeanour. But on the contrary, perhaps the very last thing they would have thought of would have been the man's doctoring his master's horse. He was not likely to gain by so doing, and had everything to lose in case of discovery. It was so clear he could not be the delinquent, they never gave a thought to the possibility of such a thing, and Houston went on—

"Whose horses are kept in this block besides mine?"

"Captain Anstruther's, sir," replied the man, "and Major Paget's."

"And which of those two gentlemen was it you saw about here last night—or were they both



down?" demanded Houston, his face darkening, whilst the others stood by astonished. What he could mean by asking questions about two of his brother-officers, was beyond their comprehension, as surely under no circumstances could he suspect them. Such men too! among the most honourable and upright in the regiment.

"It was the Captain alone, sir," answered the man. "I was about the door outside; he stopped a good while, maybe half an hour or so; and when he was coming out he stood and spoke to me."

"What did he say?" again asked Houston, his brow beginning to contract, and his eyes to flash, as though he scented vengeance from afar.

"He asked me how my horse was looking; and when I said he was the best horse in the race, and must win, he answered, 'Next to mine, you mean. Lucifer will beat him, as you will see by to-morrow evening.'"

"Never mind all that," said Brabazon, breaking in a little impatiently; "what connection

can it have with the matter in hand? Anstruther didn't doctor the horse certainly."

"That's just what I want to find out," replied Houston, darting an angry look on the speaker. "We've made out this much, at any rate; he was the only man seen about here last night, he staid a tremendous time, and on leaving he expressed his opinion my horse wouldn't win, although, in the judgment of everyone else, it was the likeliest animal in the race. Are you quite sure," he went on, turning to the man again, "that there was no one else about also?"

"Certain sure, sir," answered the servant. "Me and Bill Larkins, sir (Bill is the Captain's man, sir), was sitting smoking outside with a few friends when he came up. He called out to Bill that he needn't stir—he'd go in and see the horse himself. All of us saw him, sir; but in course we thought it was all right, and made no objection to his going into the stable alone."

"Very well," replied Houston, "that will do now, Marks. To-morrow we shall have

this matter investigated ; you and your friends will be examined, so I hope they will all be forthcoming. I'll give orders about that this evening." Then, as they walked away, he went on—"It seems to me, gentlemen, there is a very strong case, founded on circumstantial evidence, against Captain Anstruther. I am truly grieved that such a thing should happen in the regiment ; but I always mistrusted that man, and feared, from his vindictive temper and want of principle, he would come to grief some day. He hates me, we all know, and, I suppose, thought this the most certain way of annoying me. Considering circumstances, I think it is my duty to place him under arrest till the matter is cleared up."

"I cannot conceive how you can entertain the idea for a moment, on the testimony of a servant," broke in Villars hotly. "Do you think, if a man wanted to do a thing like that, he would be such a fearful fool as to go and do it himself, especially after being seen and spoken to ? I think the very open-

ness with which he entered the stable, after seeing and conversing with those men, shows how false the accusation is. He would have known, in that case, he was certain of detection, and would hardly have thought your mortification at being defeated would pay him for what he must know would be his fate if discovered."

"I don't agree with you there," answered Houston. "I think the man is a bad-tempered, unprincipled fool, and allowed himself to be so blinded by his passion as not to perceive the danger he was running. As for the testimony of one man, that goes for very little, but if the account given by the others agrees with his, it will make the matter very different. I must send down to find out the names of those others, and arrange about their appearance to-morrow; also I must put Captain Anstruther under arrest until the matter is settled. There is quite enough cause of suspicion against him to justify that course."

"I shall never believe it until it has been

proved more fully than it has at present," said Brabazon, as though awaking out of a brown study. "It is true, certainly, that he backed his horse very strongly to beat yours, Colonel; he didn't back it to win, but to beat Blue Lightning, which looks suspicious. I am awfully sorry for him, poor fellow; and really if it is the case, he isn't half to blame. It's the bad life you have led him lately, Colonel, that has upset his brain, which I think must have been injured that time he got a fall in India; he's never been the same since."

"You are right, Brabazon," chimed in Major Cardew, from the other side of the Colonel. "Houston has been too hard on him altogether, and I shouldn't wonder if it was as you say. However, we'll hear the evidence first, before we even condemn him so far."

Villars said no more. Anstruther had spoken to him that evening, and there was nothing in his manner to indicate that he was labouring under any derangement of

the brain, still less was there anything about him that could lead one to imagine he had committed a crime, likely at any minute to be detected, and that if discovered must infallibly cost him his commission. He could not understand the matter. That Anstruther was innocent he never felt for a moment inclined to doubt; that sufficient evidence might be raked together to condemn him he also saw was very probable, but he could not and would not believe it, unless the matter was made clear by the man's own confession.

Therefore it was no wonder he looked grave as he entered his tent, and saw the unfortunate man, who he knew was about to be hunted down by a powerful enemy, sitting before him, with a brighter, more eager look than he had seen him wear for a long time.

"What is the matter?" he asked as Villars entered. "You seem awfully down, and I came to have a long talk with you. I wanted to ask you about several things that have been troubling me, and which I

think you can explain. Are you too busy to attend now? If you like I will come again later."

"No, I'm not busy," answered Villars shortly. He did not know whether to tell the man at once what had happened, or to leave him to discuss his affairs in peace, until he should be put under arrest, which Villars guessed, from the Colonel's vindictive manner, would be before long.

"You don't seem like yourself this evening," said Anstruther, looking at him in some surprise; then, as the idea struck him the young fellow might be in trouble, and desire to be left alone, he put aside his own wish for satisfaction and went on,—“I'm afraid I'm boring you; I daresay you'll tell me all I want to know another time. Will you come up to my quarters whenever you are able to-morrow, and talk over a few things with me?”

“Confound it all!” cried Villars impatiently; “I can't stand this, I must tell you, and I daresay it will be the best course after all. What do I care if he is angry——”

"A sergeant outside wants Captain Anstruther," said Villars' servant, opening the door.

"How provoking!" cried Anstruther. "Ask him can he wait."

"He told me, Captain, it was very important; he wished to see you immediately."

"What made you tell him Captain Anstruther was here, you fool?" cried Villars.

"Please, sir, I didn't," answered the man. "He seemed to know the Captain was here, sir, and just told me to go in and deliver his message."

"Well, I must go, I suppose," said Anstruther, rising. "If he doesn't keep me long, I'll be back at once; if not, you won't see me till to-morrow. Good-bye;" and taking up his cap the unconscious man walked out.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Villars, "he'll be arrested now, and have a pretty time of it till he gets off. However, I suppose he'll be cleared to-morrow, unless he's awfully unfortunate. I wish I had been able to tell him what was hanging over him, before he left."

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In the meantime, Anstruther had been informed he was placed under arrest, by order of the Colonel, and walked off with his guard, in utter ignorance of the cause of this sudden detention; in fact, he attributed it to some sudden fit of anger or caprice on the part of the Colonel, a trifling indiscretion, perhaps, having given him a plausible excuse for such an exercise of tyranny; and, imagining this to be the case, he never even inquired of the sergeant the cause of the act.

He didn't trouble his head much about it, but allowed his thoughts to roam at will to the events of the day. The kind way in which she had smiled and spoken to him, how she had wished him to win, and been sorry when he didn't; how she had guessed the reason of his defeat, and been both pleased and grieved by it. Then what was it young Villars had been about to tell him? He seemed troubled and uncertain whether to speak. Could it be about her? It was possible. Oh, if only he should find all his doubts of her had been false, if he should find her the noble and true

being he had once imagined, how happy he should be. But if Villars had been about to tell him this good news, why had he seemed cast down ; how if, on the contrary, he should find all his suspicions realized ? Why, then, let the Colonel do his worst—life had no longer any attraction for him, and he might just as well be miserable as happy.

He thought over his life, since first a knowledge of his own heart had dawned upon him. He remembered well how he used to be a gay, light-hearted young fellow, full of fun, and an inveterate joker ; but at the bottom of all this superficial crust of foam and froth was a strong passionate nature, in which the fiend jealousy lay dormant. From the first minute he had known he loved, this vice had reared its malignant head, and smothered all better feelings. He had become dull, pre-occupied, and indifferent with his companions ; cold, stern, suspicious, with the one for whom he cared most, and for whom he would so gladly have sacrificed everything to ensure her happiness. But this one spot in his character spoilt all

that was otherwise fair and noble. As he thought of it now, he saw, or thought he saw, that he might have been happy long ago, safe beyond fear of other men's intervention, or the Colonel's tyranny, if only he could have trusted as others do, and taken the woman he loved with all her faults and failings, secure in her affection for him.

But this was not in his nature; and he had suffered for it, gaining experience, however, as he went. Now a change seemed to have come over him, and he began to think it possible he might forget the past, and lead a better, happier life in the future. Such were the dreams he wove for himself that night, little thinking what was in store for him on the morrow. It was just as well he didn't, poor fellow; for at least he enjoyed a brief gleam of happiness in anticipation, which, if he had known the true state of affairs, would never have visited him.

Early next morning he was taken to the Colonel's quarters; and being ushered into his sitting-room, saw with some amazement

a dozen or so of his brother-officers congregated near the fire; whilst at the door, standing in a row, were several men, whom he recognised as soldier-servants, amongst them his own man, Bill Larkins. The Colonel did not invite him to sit down when he entered, but began abruptly:

"Captain Anstruther, I suppose you are curious to know why I had you placed under arrest, without any apparent cause, last night?"

"No, I was not very anxious," Anstruther replied coolly; "for I thought probably there was as little foundation for such an act now as there has been on any of the other occasions when I have been so treated."

"I think I shall be able to satisfy you," continued Houston, turning to those around, "that I had plenty of cause for ordering this arrest, and that I was not acting from caprice or dislike. You are suspected, whether rightfully or wrongfully remains to be proved, of having drugged my horse, Blue

Lightning, the night before the races; and it is to examine into the matter——”

He paused suddenly, and looked at those around with a triumphant meaning in his glance; for as he uttered the nature of the charge, the prisoner—for so he might indeed be considered—had given a kind of start or convulsive motion, whilst the blood started in one deep dull red flush to his face, till the veins in his forehead swelled and stood out like cords, from the violence of his emotion. It was but a moment that he remained thus gazing at his accuser; then he covered his face with one hand, whilst he leant for support on the table with the other, and his whole frame trembled till he seemed hardly able to stand.

Those who had assembled convinced of his innocence exchanged glances which said plainly, Nothing more is needed; he is discovered. Even Villars, who had determined never to believe this of him, was staggered, and looked at Leveston, who was present, that he might see what effect it had on him.

But he found no comfort there. Levoston's face was horror-struck and grieved, like those of the rest. It was evident he too believed his friend's guilt.

No conclusion, however, could be arrived at until the witnesses had been examined; and, as this was only a private investigation, the criminal would have to be tried by court-martial afterwards, before justice could be satisfied and he punished.


The witnesses were next questioned, and their statements agreed exactly with what Marks had said the night before. The prisoner had been seen by them all entering the stables; he had told his servant not to follow him, and had staid there half an hour or more. On leaving, also, he had very strongly expressed his conviction that the Colonel's horse would not win; and though of course under other circumstances there would be nothing in his imagining his own animal the best, yet, as things had turned out, it looked very suspicious.

Then, when all the evidence had been col-

lected from the men, Houston turned to the officers present, and asked if none of them had been with Anstruther that evening; and if so, had they noticed anything unusual about him?

None of them, however, remembered anything bearing on the matter in hand except Marchmont, the senior lieutenant, a quiet, dull fellow, not generally taken much notice of in the regiment, who stated that, meeting Anstruther as he was going down to the stables, and showing some inclination to accompany him, he had been so snubbed that he thought it best to leave him to recover his temper, imagining that something must have annoyed him to make him so unusually irritable.

When all had been examined, and everything that was known on the matter had been brought forward, Houston called on Anstruther to speak, and say whatever he had to say in his defence. Then Anstruther removed his hand from his face, and standing up as if with an effort, looked round upon



his brother-officers—now his judges and accusers—with so white and scared a face as to be hardly recognisable. The red flush had died away, and under his dark bronzed skin he was pale as death, with a wild despairing look in his eyes, and the lines of his face set and rigid.

He gazed at them for a few minutes like one in a dream; and Villars watching him, with a pity that even the horror of the crime could not repress, noticed that the dark rings of hair resting on his forehead were damp with the drops brought by agony and fear.

“You are permitted to speak, and say whatever you can in your defence,” said the Colonel again, seeing the man hardly knew what was going on around him. Then the dull vacant stare in his eyes gave place to a more comprehending but quite as pitiful look, as he scanned slowly the faces before him. What he read in them roused him a little, for, lifting up his right hand towards heaven, he said,



"I call God to witness I am innocent of this deed of which I am accused. Leveston, you at least believe me. How many years have we known each other!—you won't desert me now in my need?"

His voice was hollow and broken, but it stirred the hearts of those who listened. Leveston, convinced of his guilt, yet pitying his old friend still, answered,

"I do not believe that love of gain led you astray, as some seem to believe, but I fear greatly resentment has caused you to fall into this crime. Tell us what have you to say against all the evidence brought forward."

"You don't believe me, Leveston," he answered hoarsely. "Then if you don't, who will? Why should I answer my accusers? They say they saw me enter the stables; and it is true I did so—I cannot disprove that; I can only assert that neither vengeance, nor gain, nor any other advantage to be derived from such an act, would have led me to commit it. I am innocent, and even you,

who might have known me better, won't believe me. Will not one of you all, who have lived so many years with me, take my word? I can only give you that, but it has never been broken."

"I believe you, in spite of it all!" cried Villars, springing up and shaking him by the hand. "Cheer up, old fellow, the real culprit will be discovered some day, and I cannot doubt you when you speak so. As I hope to be believed, if doubt ever falls on me, I will believe you now. I feel you must be innocent, whatever the world may say against you."

"Whilst I live I shall never forget you, Villars!" he gasped, the revulsion of feeling at finding that even one still befriended him nearly destroying his temporary calmness. "You have done for me this day more than I can ever repay, and when all my old friends deserted me, you alone, whom I have known so short a time, stood by me. May you never want a true friend in your need, as you have befriended me in mine."

"Let me advise you, then," said Villars, still standing beside his friend, regardless of the astonished or threatening looks of those around. "Tell them what you were doing in the stables. You have no witness, it is true, but let them not imagine it was guilt prevented your making a defence."

"I will try and tell all I can," answered Anstruther; "but there is so little to say—it is almost all what you have heard, only that the conclusion drawn is false. I met Marchmont, as he says, and being occupied thinking of my own private affairs at the time, I was rather worried when he began talking of the dresses of different riders next day. The fact is, I didn't snub him, as he said—I only asked him, like a good fellow, to excuse my company just then, as I was busy thinking over some private matter I had heard that day. He turned and went off, I continuing my way to the stables. There I met the men, as they said. I also went in alone, and stopped a long time in the box with my horse, leaning against the

wall, and thinking over what had been engrossing my mind before. I went into no other box in the stable; and when I found how long I had been there, returned straight home again. I said my horse would beat the Colonel's, because I believed in any case it would, and not because I had the very faintest idea anything would be wrong with his. That's all the defence I can make; but I am guiltless, I swear, and such an act as that of which I am accused, it would never have entered into my head to commit."

"That's all very fine," sneered the Colonel, "and it looks very well in you, Villars, to stand up thus for a man whose guilt is so clearly proved. But perhaps, gentlemen, you remarked his confusion when the charge was first brought against him—before the witnesses were examined or anything? That did not look very like innocence; and I confess it was that more than anything else that confirmed my opinion of his guilt."

"Yes," said Leveston, speaking in a low unsteady voice, for the first time since he had signified his belief in his comrade's crime, "it was only from you yourself that I would have believed it, but your face revealed what your words would deny. Do not think me hard because I thus condemn you, for no testimony of others would ever have moved me, if you had appeared guiltless."

"Shall I tell you," Anstruther answered in a low voice, "why I was so moved? It might have happened to others under the same circumstances, and yet they might be as devoid of offence as I truly am. You know well, all of you," he went on more boldly, and with indignation gleaming in his eyes,—"you know how that man has treated me since he joined; how I have had no peace or happiness, on account of his persecutions. Is it any wonder that, when I saw myself here to-day, accused of a crime which, if proved against me, must result in my ruin—is it any wonder that, knowing the power and malignity of my enemy, I saw with cruel dis-

tinctness that my fate was fixed, and was for a moment overwhelmed? Oh! old friends and comrades! place yourselves for a minute in my position, and think, would not you have given way also; or am I weaker than other men, as I truly am more unfortunate?"

But this appeal moved them not. They were unable to account in such a way for his wild emotion, though Villars still maintained his innocence, and tried hard to make others see it also.

Then it was decided he should be tried by court-martial; and if convicted of the offence, would be cashiered. This he knew well, and from the time he found his old friends had been so far blinded and misled by appearances as to believe them in preference to him, he felt his doom was sealed.

When he had time to think it all over in solitude, his heart quailed at the prospect before him. First of all, he was separated for ever from Cecil; he might never hope to hear her sweet voice again, or see her

welcoming smile. Her father, his old friend—and before this he thought him so true a friend—was one of those who believed in his guilt. Into that house where he had spent so many happy hours, he should go no more. Then his profession—he should lose that, his only means of support in life: for Anstruther was not a rich man; he should not even be able to sell his commission, and so have some small fund to fall back on when looking out for a new employment. And who would employ him, a broken and dishonoured man? Truly his life was blighted, and by this man who he knew loved Cecil, and would, he felt, try to win and marry her, once he was out of the way.

It should not be—he was determined on that; somehow he would see her and tell her all. But then a cold fear shot through him, more keen and agonising than any he had yet experienced. What if she too should believe him guilty; would her father persuade her to think with him? He prayed not; that would indeed be misery, and he

should be truly friendless. Yet stay! not quite; that young fellow he used to dislike so much, surely he had said something about standing by him. Well, he and she were friends; it was just possible she might take his view of the case, if she cared for him. And then he remembered, with bitter remorse, how he had refused to trust her; and how she had said, when suspicion and distrust came to him, she would never forsake him, but believe him against the world.

In the meantime, she had heard all from her father; and firing up like a little tigress, had denounced both the Colonel and his horse, in no measured terms. Leveston, too, came in for a larger share of her wrath than he had ever felt before.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, papa!” she cried, “to think ill of him. He do a mean trick of that kind—never! He’d have beaten the Colonel in fair field, no doubt, very joyfully. Who can wonder if he was pleased to annoy the man who so ill-treated him; but lower himself to such an act he could not.”



"Child! child!" said her father, a little impatiently, "you know nothing of a man's nature, and are talking of what you don't understand. No one can bear to lose a race, least of all the Colonel, who is ambitious and proud. Anstruther hated him, and he knew in no other way could he so surely mortify him. Then, again, a man will do anything that is in his power to win, unless he is very high principled; and once our poor friend had contemplated the possibility of so acting to annoy Houston, no doubt the hope that, his most formidable rival away he should be sure of winning, influenced him also; though, I think, in the first instance, hatred was the moving power."

"But he didn't win after all," answered Cecil, more slowly; "and whatever you say, I don't believe he did it. He is too true, too upright, too noble. Do you know, papa, I once heard of a man who voluntarily lost a race for love. What do you say to that? Doesn't it upset your theory?"

"Are you sure it was true, dear?" asked her father, laughing; "if so, he was indeed a *rare*

*avis*, and, at any rate, couldn't have been a man of our time. We don't do those things now-a-days, and a lady who should exact such a proof of devotion from her lover would be very likely to find herself left in the lurch."

"Well, never mind that," answered the girl gently, "but tell me—you don't really think this of Anstruther? You can't; he has always been your friend, and you know him too well to think thus."

"My darling Cecil," replied Leveston, "it grieves me quite as much as it possibly can you to think evil of Anstruther; but I am sorry to say his confusion was so manifest and overwhelming, his guilt so apparent when the accusation was brought against him, I should be a fool indeed to doubt."

She said not another word, but leaving the room, crept quietly to her own apartment, where, flinging herself on the floor, she burst into passionate floods of tears.

"Oh! love! love!" she cried; "I know you are true and innocent! Would that I could tell you so! I could hate my own father for

doubting you. Oh! if I could but see you! I must and will do so; happen what may, I will find my way to you. Why was I ever proud and hard to him? What matter if he doubted me at first, he would soon have known better, and we might have been so happy now! I wonder what they will do to him if they convict him? Cashier him, I suppose; and then where will he go?—what will become of him, without one to comfort or cheer him? If he will take me now, I will go with him, no matter what his fate may be. Yes, still in spite of the world, and these cruel, hard men, we may be happy together. I will do it.”

Full of this idea, she began planning and turning over in her mind how she was to get to him, and win his consent to her scheme. Not that she thought he could refuse her this request—she knew he loved her so well.

But whilst she planned and schemed till her brain ached, trying to devise some way of getting to him, he, shut up and alone, had no word or token from her, and at last thought that, like all the rest, she doubted him. He said so to

Villars at last, who came every day to see him, asking his only friend if he had heard the Queen speak of him, and what she thought about the matter.

"I have never spoken to her alone since it occurred," replied Villars; "but she seems very low, and takes no pleasure in company. She's like a person whose mind is always occupied with some object not present before her, and I don't think she looks well."

"Speak to her about it, like a good fellow," implored Anstruther, "and tell me what she says; whether she thinks with her father or with you in the matter."

Villars promised to find out, seeing how the unfortunate man was wearing his very soul out with doubts, and hopes, and fears that he had no means of solving to his satisfaction.

The court-martial was over at last, and, as might be expected, where everyone was so strongly impressed with his guilt, Anstruther was found guilty of the charge brought against him and cashiered. He behaved like an automaton throughout, neither speaking nor moving,

scarcely seeming to breathe; and his sentence, when it was pronounced, appeared to pass unheard by him, except for a slight quivering that passed over his entire frame.

Villars, who alone maintained his innocence, helped him from the room, he being so overwhelmed as to be unable to walk without support; but he gasped as he reached the outer air,

“Tell her from me I am innocent.”

“Where shall I find you when I have seen her?” asked Villars hurriedly; he didn’t wish curious ears around to overhear their conversation.

“I shall hang about the town for a day or two, till I see you, I suppose,” Anstruther answered bitterly. “But don’t keep me long there, where every finger can be pointed at me, and every tongue will be saying, ‘That’s the man who was cashiered the other day in the —th Dragoons.’”

“You’ll see me to-morrow and hear all I can tell you, never fear,” answered his friend; and so, walking with him to the

outskirts of the camp, Villars watched his brother-officer and comrade move off into the darkening twilight, never to return to the regiment again.

## CHAPTER IX.

“THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN  
SMOOTH.”

ACCORDING to his promise, Villars contrived to get a few minutes' quiet talk with Cecil that evening. He called immediately after mess, and before her father had returned—he had been dining with them that day. He found the once gay and brilliant little Queen sitting alone and very downcast in her pretty drawing-room.

She hardly smiled as she rose to greet him, and during his first few observations seemed absent, barely answering when he spoke. But at last he approached the object of his visit, saying,

"This is a dreadful piece of business, your Majesty, isn't it?"

She looked at him defiantly. She had never heard that he sided with the sufferer, and fancied he was about to condemn him to her. She therefore answered haughtily,

"It is a shameful business for those who were his judges! He is innocent at least, but they are not who could thus treat a man they should have known so well."

"You are right," he answered; "but I fear we two are almost the only ones in camp who think thus. His last message for you to-day when I left him was, 'Tell her that I am innocent.' He was afraid that you might have been influenced by your father's opinion, and might condemn him also."

"Oh!" she cried, flushing up with excitement, "you are true—you believe him guiltless—you must help me! I will go and see him once again before he leaves the country, and you will take me to him; you won't refuse this, surely?"



Villars looked irresolute and startled. He had not contemplated the possibility of her taking such a step as this, and shrank from being partner in it. After a few minutes' pause, however, he answered—

"Is that a wise thing to do, Miss Leveston? It can be of no use to the poor fellow, and will make him feel the misery of his situation more keenly. In any case, if you go at all, ought not your father to be with you? I fear I may get you into trouble if I assist you in so rash an undertaking."

"Never mind that," she cried hastily and bitterly; "no trouble can be worse than this, and I must see him again before he leaves. As to my father, you know what he thinks on the matter, and how little likely I am to persuade him to do this for me. No, if you won't help me, I shall go by myself; it will be more difficult to me, no doubt, but I will do it. Tell me where I shall find him. At least you have no right to withhold that knowledge from me."

"I won't desert you, Queen," he answered

gently. "If you will go I will take you, and help you as best I can. Shall you be able to come to-morrow? I was going to see him then."

"Thanks a thousand times," she replied, her face lighting up, as she thought that, after all, she would see him again, and be able to accomplish her project. "You are a true friend, Villars, one who will help in need as well as in prosperity. To-morrow; of course I will be ready," she continued, "at any hour that is convenient to you."

Then they settled it all quietly, before Leveston returned. She was to meet him a little way out of camp on the Kildare road, where he would wait for her with his dog-cart. She was to disguise herself as much as possible in a long waterproof cloak, with a thick veil tied over her face, to avoid recognition by those who might meet them; and so Villars hoped to be able to conduct her in safety to the obscure back street in Kildare where the fallen man had taken up his abode.

Next day at breakfast Cecil said to her father,

"I am going out to pay a visit this morning, so don't be surprised if I am not home to lunch. Can I do anything for you before I go, papa dear?"

"Nothing," he replied, thinking that her sorrow and indignation for her old friend's misfortunes had passed off very rapidly. She seemed excited and rather gay to-day, but if he had been observant he would have noticed a hardness about her gaiety, not at all natural to her. There was a struggle going on in her between affection for her father and love for this man, whom she was stealing out secretly to see; and her love was gaining the victory over natural affection, and turning her against the father, who dared think evil of him she loved.

She would so like to have laid her head on her father's shoulder, and confessed all; but she knew well, in that case, she should lose what she was striving now to gain. The only way in which she could hope to succeed was by

deceiving, and getting clear off before her intention was discovered.

If Anstruther would marry her, and take her with him, she might not be able to get away that day, as they would have arrangements to make before the ceremony could be performed, and therefore the final farewell to her father and her home would not have to be said at least until sometime later. Heavy as her heart felt she dared not show it, for fear of being questioned; and the effort to suppress these feelings, and to think more kindly of the father she was about to leave, imparted an uncertain, defiant levity to her manner, very unlike her usual gentle merriment.

But when she went to her room, and began to put on, with trembling fingers, the dress in which she was to take this most important step, her heart melted within her, and she could not refrain from shedding tears as she thought of her gay girlhood passed away for ever; for she knew that one who could act as she was about to do had indeed passed over the boundary that separates girlhood from

womanhood. Her tears were quickly dried, however, as she hurried on her things, and thought of the necessity for immediate action. Besides, she was about to do what, under any other circumstances, would have been so repugnant to her feelings that she hardly knew how she should carry it into execution.

She set out at last, thoroughly muffled up and disguised, passed the camp, and arrived at the rendezvous before Villars. He didn't keep her long waiting, but presently came without a servant, assisted her to her seat, and drove off again without speaking. Before they had gone far, he turned to her and said,

"I am greatly afraid, Miss Leveston, I am doing wrong by helping you in this matter; will you not think better of it, and allow me to take you home without going any further?"

"If you don't wish to assist me say so at once," she answered sharply. "It will make no difference now, I shall simply walk on to

Kildare and find him out. It will give me more trouble, and the additional pain of finding I have a friend less than I thought; but a little grief more or less cannot matter to me now, so pray act as you think best."

"You wrong me," he replied gently, "if you imagine that for one minute I consider myself in this matter; it is for you only I am alarmed. You must know well it will in no way injure me to do as you ask, while it may be the cause of serious annoyance to you. However, as I find you will not be happy until you have seen him, I will put away my scruples, and do the best I can to shield you from any evil consequences."

When they got near the town, Villars stopped at a field shaded by luxuriant trees, and full of quiet nooks, screened from the observation of passers-by.

"Wait here," he said; "I will bring him to you. The people in the house where he stays might recognize you, and, besides, it is not a pleasant locality; the houses are poor and bad

where he is at present. Remain here till I return."

She acquiesced quietly. Her mind was too much taken up with the one great object she had in view, to care where or how she accomplished it, so long as she did accomplish it at last; therefore, after watching the dog-cart till it vanished from sight, she chose a secluded bank, and sat down to wait till he should appear.

Villars found Anstruther alone, in a poor dark lodging, evidently awaiting his arrival with impatience. He looked up eagerly as his friend entered, and stretched out his hand, but did not speak; only his face expressed the mute inquiry, "What does she think?"

"It's all right," answered Villars, in reply to the unspoken question. "She believes in your innocence as firmly as I do; and what's more, she wants to see you before you go."

"Does she?" he asked eagerly. "Then I will see her, no matter what difficulties lie in the way of our meeting; though I suppose it will not be easy to get near her."

Her father would never let me come to his house, I imagine."

"She thought not," answered Villars, "and so has come here to see you. She made me bring her in the dog-cart. I left her in a field outside the town, whilst I went to find you. Come with me—I will take you to her."

In another minute they were in the dog-cart, and whirling back in the direction in which Cecil had been left. When they reached the field, Villars drew up, and said—

"She is there waiting for you. I shall hang about the roads till you call me, and then take her home as she came. But mind," he added, "this is the last time I can do it. I am afraid of getting the poor child into trouble, and she doesn't understand the danger she runs herself."

"You are a good fellow, Villars," said Anstruther, squeezing his hand. "How could I have been so slow to find it out?"

And so he passed into the field in search of Cecil, leaving Villars walking his horse



up and down patiently, within easy hail whenever their interview should be over.

He found her sitting, waiting in a sorrowful attitude, under the shade of a copse of wide-spreading beeches. She was pale, and dark rings under her eyes spoke of sleepless nights and a sorrowful heart. She did not see him at first, and sat with hands listlessly crossed upon her lap and drooping head, until the sound of his footsteps startled her. Then she looked up hurriedly, a brilliant flush springing to her cheek and brow as she rose and held out both her hands, saying brokenly,

“I couldn’t let you go without seeing you—it would have killed me. Tell me you are glad I came.”

“My own one!” he answered, taking her in his arms as he had once done before, when death looked them grimly in the face, “you have made me too happy. I shall take a lighter heart into my exile than I ever had thought possible, now that I know you believe me.”

"I could not disbelieve you if I would," she murmured fondly. "You have been all that is upright, noble, and true to me since I can remember. I couldn't change all at once, and think you mean, base, and false, whatever others may do."

"And yet I mistrusted you, miserable fool that I was!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Darling, can you ever forgive me my wretched jealousy—for it was that caused all our unhappiness. I thought you loved Villars, and had told him so. I overheard one day some words between you in a ruined temple near Poonah, and it seemed to me you offered him your love, and he refused it. I know now it must have been something else, and that I have been both cruel and wicked to think ill of you; but this has been the cause of all our misunderstandings and troubles. Now when we are parting, probably for ever, can you forgive me the wrong I have done you?"

"Shall I tell you, dear, what it was you overheard?" she answered, smiling softly and

happily through her tears. "No, you must hear," she went on, as he was about to interrupt her. "It was that noble, foolish boy, Villars, who thought he loved me, and wanted me to marry him. I wouldn't. I didn't care for him very much then, and I cared for some one else a great deal; so I told him friendship was all I could offer him, which he refused then scornfully, but has since proved the best friend I have, with the exception of one. If I had not been such a proud little fool we might have been so happy now. I feel as if your misfortunes were a punishment on my pride, and that is the hardest part of them all to bear, the idea that it is I have brought them on you. But you said just now we were about to part for ever. Surely you would not have the heart to punish me thus? Say that you did not think of such a thing."

"Child," he answered, "what is there but that before us? Your father would never hear of my marrying you, after such a stigma having been cast upon my name.

Our fate is hard indeed to bear, but no efforts of ours can make it better."

"You asked me once to be your wife, with all my faults on my head," she whispered softly, with such innocent shamefacedness at the proposition she was about to make, that her lover felt it was impossible he could give her up, even though he knew that it must be so. "I refused then because I was too haughty to allow even you to think me blameworthy in any particular. Now I see how wrong I was, and see, too, that I cannot live without you amongst these cruel hateful people who have charged you with committing this crime, and have ruined your life, and will ruin mine, if you don't grant my request. Take me with you; I will marry you now, even though you should still mistrust me, but I will not live away from you."

He held her from him sadly, and scanned her blushing face fixedly, as he answered, "My child, you don't know what you ask. The world, that has been at your feet, will

happily through her tears. "No, you must hear," she went on, as he was about to interrupt her. "It was that noble, foolish boy, Villars, who thought he loved me, and wanted me to marry him. I wouldn't. I didn't care for him very much then, and I cared for some one else a great deal; so I told him friendship was all I could offer him, which he refused then scornfully, but has since proved the best friend I have, with the exception of one. If I had not been such a proud little fool we might have been so happy now. I feel as if your misfortunes were a punishment on my pride, and that is the hardest part of them all to bear, the idea that it is I have brought them on you. But you said just now we were about to part for ever. Surely you would not have the heart to punish me thus? Say that you did not think of such a thing."

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He held her from him sadly, and scanned her blushing face fixedly, as he answered, "My child, you don't know what you ask. The world, that has been at your feet, will

be against you. Your old companions will point the finger of scorn at you, your friends will pity you, your enemies sneer at you; and if your heart is great enough to withstand and despise all this, there will be toil, and poverty, and hardship around you—for, my darling, I am only a poor man, with but enough money to take me to one of the colonies, where the labour of my hands may earn my daily bread.”

But she clung to him sobbing. “Take me with you; what do I care for the world, or poverty, or hardship, as long as I have you; only do not tell me to leave you, I can bear all but that.”

“Heaven help me!” he muttered; “I cannot tell you to do so, though I know it would be better far for you, if you did. But answer me, darling: could you bear to leave your father, whom you love so well, and who cares for you so tenderly—who has watched over you and guarded you since you were left motherless as a little child? Think of him, how he would grieve after

you, and believe you lost to him for ever. If you have no pity for yourself, will you not have pity on him?"

"No," she answered sullenly; "he has deserted you, his old friend, whom he should have upheld in the hour of need. I pity my father, but I could almost hate him too, when I think of how he has treated you, and that he stands between me and happiness. Don't think me too wicked, or turn from me when I say that, if I must choose between you and him, I choose you."

Anstruther groaned, and large drops stood on his forehead, as he renewed the struggle for what he felt was right against all his heart longed for.

"Cecil," he said slowly and with an effort, "if you will not think of your father, I must. He has treated me hardly, but he believed he was acting for the truth; can I, his old friend and comrade, steal from him his only daughter, just when a blight has fallen on my name and character that will make me for ever a marked man among

honourable men all over the world? Would it not be acting like the villain he deems me, and give him just cause for thinking even worse of me than he does at present?"

"You are right," she said; "you always are. But what am I to do? You would not send me back to live amongst all those hard cruel people? I shall die among them if I have no hope of seeing you again; I know I shall. Spare me a little, as well as my father." She clung to him trembling, her lovely face turned up to his, her eyes brimming over with tears, her agony and despair so intense and real that he shuddered and turned away his head before pronouncing his decision; which surely pained him as much and more than her, and which a nature honourable in its direst distress only could have arrived at.

"We will not part for ever," he said, taking her hands and pressing them to his lips. "I was wrong, I see, ever to think of it, but we must part for awhile. Listen,

darling, as calmly as you can, whilst I tell you what I believe best for us both. I am going out to Australia, to try my fortune at the gold-fields. At first it will be very uphill work, and I may often fail, but strong men, who can and will labour, must succeed in the end; and I shall, for I have a prize in view to reward my success. Whilst I am working will you wait?—that is all I ask. In three years you will be of age, and in that time I hope at least to have gained a footing, and have a true knowledge of the difficulties before me. Then I shall write to your father, and tell him how long I have loved you, and how we have waited for each other. If he gives his consent, all will be well; if not, I will come for you, and we will marry without his leave. Do you think you can have patience for so long, love?"

"I can wait for seven years, like Jacob, if need be," she replied, a faint smile curving her lips; "only you will come back. I cannot bear to think you should forget me now, though at



one time I wanted you to do so. You will write at least, won't you?"

"Surely," he answered. "I shall want the comfort of your letters sorely now and then, I fear; but, with the hope of winning you before me, I shall be successful, and we must be happy in the end. And now, darling, we must part. Young Villars waits to take you home; we must bid each other a long good-bye. I leave to-night, and for three years we shall see each other no more."

"Must we part so soon?" she sobbed. "Swear to me you will come back again. What shall I do if you forget me?"

"That is not likely," he answered sadly. "I might more easily fear for you, who will be surrounded by flatterers and admirers; but I will not mistrust you after the lesson I have had. Only, darling, beware of Houston. He is a bold, determined man, and he loves you. He is the only rival I fear, but I dread him."

"Believe me now, will you?" she cried passionately, "whilst I promise you, before heaven, no word or token of love shall that man ever

obtain from me. If I ever marry him, may the vengeance of Heaven light on me!"

"Hush!" he said warningly; "I would take your word without calling Heaven to witness; and though I know such a union could never be possible, I cannot bear to hear the wrath of Heaven invoked on your head."

Bitter was the parting between them, but it was soon over. Anstruther strode away to look for Villars, and Cecil, veiling once more her tear-stained eyes, waited by the roadside for his arrival. He did not keep her long, but Anstruther, unable to bear the last adieu before a third person, had arranged with Cecil he should not return. Villars, therefore, assisted her up as before, and they drove away.

It was a very silent drive back to the camp. Villars, guessing that the interview had been a sorrowful one, did not speak; but the gentle care he bestowed on his companion went to her heart—it told so plainly all the sympathy he felt for her.

She wasn't back till long after lunch-time,

but as she had already expressed her intention of being out, her absence excited no comment; and when she returned she retired for the rest of the evening to her room, under the plea of a bad headache.

What a weary life she led for the next few weeks! Violent emotion had really made her feel ill, and, not wishing to be observed, she was obliged to exert herself very much, to appear in any way like her former self. Her laugh would not ring out as spontaneously as formerly when a merry story was told, nor her prattle over the tea-table sound as cheerful as it used, try as she might; her cheek became paler and thinner, and her movements more languid, till even the most careless eye could perceive that something was wrong with the little Queen.

Villars alone knew the key to this enigma, but he kept it to himself, you may be sure. In one particular way, however, Cecil could tell that he sympathised with her, and was doing his best to save her from annoyance.

The Colonel looked in for a cup of tea almost every afternoon now, and would attach himself exclusively to Cecil the whole time he remained in the room. Her former liking for this man had turned into the most violent aversion, which she found it impossible wholly to disguise, looking upon him, as she did, as the cause of Anstruther's expulsion from the regiment.

It was plain enough to everybody that, for some reason, the Queen had changed her mind about the Colonel, and now could hardly tolerate his presence. Villars perceived it as well as the rest, and divining the cause, set himself to relieve his friend and baffle Houston as much as lay in his power.

With this intention he always hung about near them, joining in their conversation, and preventing anything approaching to a tête-à-tête; till Houston would gnaw his moustache with rage, and wish devoutly he had got rid of that cursed puppy at the same time as he had the other fellow.

Houston saw that for some reason or other she liked him less than she used; but he had

so taught himself to consider that, once his rival was away, it would be all right, that he never for a moment dreamed it was that very absence caused such a breach between them.

Cecil had heard from Anstruther once since he left, telling her that he had taken a passage to Queensland, and intended to try his luck in the new gold-fields discovered there. Now he had sailed, and she could not hope to hear again from him till he landed; but, in the meantime, she consoled herself a little by writing to him, that he might have news of her as soon as possible after his arrival. She had thought all the officers of the regiment, with the exception of Villars, agreed in believing in her lover's guilt, but accident revealed to her that there was one other true-hearted man who thought as she did on the matter.

She was walking with Paget through the camp one day, going to meet her father somewhere, when the Major stopped a man passing, and said,

"Sims, have you moved those horses to another stable, as I told you?"

"Not yet, sir," answered Sims, saluting. "I wished first to tell you the stables you was putting them into is no ways so convenient as the one they're in at present, sir."

"Never mind that," answered Paget, rather impatiently for him; "I didn't tell you to think about convenience or anything else. Do as I ordered you, and move the horses. I have my reasons."

When they had walked on a few steps, Cecil inquired, for want of something better to say,

"Why are you moving your horses, Major?"

"They're in the same block with the Colonel's; and as I don't wish to run the risk of being accused of drugging his animals the next time it may be convenient to make that charge against anybody, I preferred getting them out of the place."

"Then you don't believe it!" cried Cecil, with rapture. "I thought you all did. I am so glad to find I was mistaken."

"Thought I believed that trumped-up charge against Anstruther! My dear girl, you can't have a high opinion of my sense," said Paget, laughing. Then, suddenly recollecting that the father of the girl to whom he was talking was one of those firmly convinced of the man's guilt, he added, "Not but that many wiser and more sensible heads than mine have been deceived in the matter; but I cannot believe that a man should suddenly, in one night as it were, belie his whole breeding and training from childhood up, and give the lie by his acts to the conduct for which he has always been distinguished."

"I agree with you," she said warmly. "Oh! Major Paget, you cannot tell how grieved I was to hear that such a charge had been brought against him; and, worse than all, that my own father had turned from his old friend when he stood most in need of support!"

"Hush! Cecil," cried the Major, warningly; "don't be led into blaming your father, no matter how different his view of the case may

be from what you deem the right one. Remember always he would never have given his voice against his old comrade had he not been deeply convinced of his guilt; and, however much we may wonder at his judgment being so warped, we should still respect it as conscientious. It is a dangerous frame of mind that would lead us to condemn those older and wiser than ourselves."

"I believe you are right," she answered, taking her friend's quiet reproof humbly and penitently. "I will try and not be as angry with papa as I have been; but indeed I am glad that you are on my side. How is it I didn't hear you were of that way of thinking before?"

"I was not at the investigation, nor on the court-martial either. I believe there was some more important evidence brought forward there than at the private inquiry, which perhaps you mayn't have heard; and that it was that principally decided the case. I don't believe it a bit, however—at least, I mean I don't agree with the inference they draw from it."



“What was it?” asked Cecil, eagerly. “I should like to hear it; for it seemed to me their evidence was very slight to convict him on.”

“His glove was found among the litter in Blue Lightning’s stall when it was being done up that evening, and it was supposed he dropped it there when administering the dose. The man Marks gave it as his evidence that, being anxious to devote as much care and time as possible to the horse, he had dressed him early, and only partially tidied up the box, because, by the time he went to that part of his work, it was getting late, and he thought it best to leave the animal a little quiet before taking him out for the race. Then, in the evening, when he was making up the horse for the night, he discovered the glove, and at once brought it to the Colonel, who identified it as one of a pair Austruther had worn several times lately. A peculiarly-coloured brown they were. You remember, perhaps?”

“Yes, I think I do. I thought them pretty,”

answered Cecil. "I can't account for the glove being in the loose box; but it doesn't shake my belief in Anstruther's innocence all the same."

When she went back to their hut afterwards, and could get into the quiet of her own room, it comforted Cecil not a little to think that there was yet another, and that one of the most trustworthy men in the regiment, who thought Gerald Anstruther wrongfully accused, even against such a strong piece of circumstantial evidence as that he had told her of, and of which she had until then been in ignorance. Would the mystery that surrounded the transaction ever be cleared up, she wondered. And thus thinking, she went down to sit in their little drawing-room, and await the coming of any guests that might drop in.

Pleasure at the discovery of Paget's incredulity on this distressing subject had brightened her up and lent a little colour to her cheek this afternoon, so that many of her visitors remarked "how awfully jolly she

was looking!" never for a minute guessing the cause.

When Houston entered, the change struck him. "She is getting out of the mopes," he thought; and bending near her, while she poured out tea, he whispered, in a tone meant only for her ear,

"You cannot think how glad I am to see you looking better, Cecil. I have thought you were ill of late."

It was the first time he had ever dared to address her by her Christian name, and the blood mounted to her face as he did so; but she, without turning towards him, and with a half-malicious look directed to Villars, answered coldly,

"I am sorry you distressed yourself on my account, Colonel. You see there *was* no occasion for it; and please remember, next time, it is only my *old* friends that have the privilege of calling me Cecil?"

"And who are your old friends, if I might ask?" hotly inquired Houston.


"I'll tell you with pleasure," she replied;

thinking, "What a fool he is to enter into a war of words with a woman!" "They are Paget, Anstruther, Villars, and some others. I have only had the honour of knowing you for a few short months."

## CHAPTER X.

## LEVESTON HEARS STRANGE THINGS.

LIFE seemed very dull and stagnant to Cecil for some time after her lover's departure. She could not, try as she might, take an interest in the things going on around her. She felt as if the connecting link between her and them had been severed, and she stood alone in a different world; a sad world it was, viewing what passed on this with dull, unfeeling eyes. What did it matter to her now if others rejoiced?—there was no joy but one could move her heart, and the hope of that was so far in the future she could not join them in their merriment. If they sorrowed, still less had she power to sym-



pathise ; her own grief filled her heart, she could spare no tears for the woes of others. Yet, though she felt thus, and though those around noticed how her spirits failed, and how undemonstrative and quiet she had become, yet her beauty did not seem to suffer from the inward wound ; only her large dark eyes assumed a more tender, more pitiful expression, and the curves of her mouth fell into lines of a more sorrowful sweetness than formerly. She was changed, but it was an attractive change ; before, her beauty appealed to the senses only, now it stirred the hearts of those who looked at her.

Houston saw the alteration, and, knowing the cause, he inwardly chafed and raged at the power this man had obtained over her ; yet his admiration increased tenfold, and he vowed deeply to his own heart that, come what would, she should yet be his. He did not seem to think or care that, her heart being given to this other man, she could never feel for him as he

desired, and as alone could make them happy together. His own nature was so fiery and ardent, his devotion so intense and heartfelt, that he believed fondly he could conquer love from her, if once he had her in his power, and her association with this man broken off.

There was still an obstacle in the way he had not counted on, and the reason for the sudden importance of which he was at a loss to discover. This was neither more nor less than the subaltern, young Villars, for whose company, and that of Paget, Cecil alone showed any predilection. Houston could give a guess, of course, why the society of those two was so grateful to her, but that did not make matters any better; worse, on the contrary, as he would have liked to put everything that reminded her of Anstruther out of sight altogether. And of these two men, the one who was most constantly with her—indeed, who seemed to the Colonel never to leave her—was Villars. The reason of this we understand. She took a

melancholy pleasure in the society of the young man who knew her secret, and who had helped her to get the last look of her lost love. Besides, she was glad of his constant attendance and intrusion whenever the Colonel was by; it prevented words being said that both parties must regret afterwards.

Leveston noticed nothing, at least for some time. She had such a brave soul, this little Queen of the Regiment, that she bore up well; and though keen eyes, knowing something, could read the rest, unobservant, quiet men like her father could not see the wistfulness in the forced smile, nor mark the want of ring in the once merry laugh, or the languid tone of the once cheerful voice. These were the changes to be noticed; she still smiled and laughed and sung when before the eyes of the world, and did it with a gallant, proud bearing, too, as one who will be merry in spite of all; but most of those around could tell it was acting, "though marvellous well counterfeited."

Leveston, however, as before said, neither



saw nor understood what was under his very eyes ; and being a man who could be very harsh, notwithstanding his own weak, self-indulged nature, when he fancied another had been to blame, taught himself to look upon Anstruther as a criminal of the blackest dye. It was too bad to think he should, for so many years, have made a bosom friend of one who could be driven by any circumstances into such a deed as that which his quondam ally had committed. He felt as if he had been duped into according his friendship, not recognizing that it was the slow growth of years, built up, in the first instance, on the foundation of pity for misfortune.

Believing thus ill of his friend, Leveston exclaimed, one morning at breakfast,

“ I cannot help wondering at that man, Cecil, whom we all loved so well, and treated so kindly, turning out the black sheep he has done.”

“ I don't know exactly what you mean by his turning out a black sheep,” she replied ; “ but I suppose your mention of kind treat-

ment is meant for irony, as ever since Colonel Houston joined he did not get much of that. But," she went on, "as you say, no treatment would justify such a deed, and that deed he never committed. It was a vile fabrication, got up by the Colonel, and supported by witnesses supplied by him, and that dared not speak the truth as they knew it."

"Hush—hush, child!" said her father, looking round uneasily. "Don't let me hear you say anything of that kind again. The man was as surely guilty as I am innocent; none could look in his face and doubt it."

"I could and did!" cried the girl wildly. "When he told me he was innocent, there was no tremor in his voice, no hesitation in his words, no quailing in his eye. He met my look with the brave, proud calm of despair, but of innocent despair surely. Oh! father, how have you been blinded and misled, that you could not see how much nobler and truer was this man than his accuser!"

"Cecil," said her father quietly, and for him with a certain unusual sternness of manner,

"what are you talking of? When did you see this man? Not since his trial, surely?"

Cecil put her hand up to her throat and tried to speak, but for a time the agitation of her nerves was too great, whilst her father sat waiting for an answer with a grave, pained face. She had not meant to tell all that had happened; but now it must come out; her father's suspicions were aroused, and would not easily be lulled, she knew. At length she conquered her wild terror, and murmured,

"I did see him once after his trial. I could not let him go until I had told him that I believed in his innocence. Oh! papa, don't be angry with me," she cried piteously, "because I think differently from you in this matter, and have done what I know you disapprove; but he was so old a friend, and had always been so good to me—I had known and believed in him from childhood—I couldn't begin to doubt him now."

Leveston rose and paced up and down the room. The sight of his daughter's grief dis-

tressed him ; for he was a tender-hearted man, though selfish. Indeed it was more because he saw her trouble, and was pained by it, that he grieved, than because she was in trouble. Any distress with which he was not brought into actual contact had little power to move him, and now he felt strongly inclined to leave the room, and say no more about the matter, in order to escape what was unpleasant to him ; but that he felt there was more in this than he had heard, and was, for his own sake as well as his daughter's, determined to sift it to the bottom, he would have done so.

Stopping suddenly in his measured walk, he turned on the girl who was sitting in a pretty drooping attitude by the tea-table. She was too frightened to dare raise her eyes, and her whole look betokened extreme dejection. Gazing at her as she sat thus, it occurred to her father there must be more than mere grief for an old friend mixed with this intense sorrow for Anstruther's disgrace ; and the idea that had once before haunted him as a pleasant day-dream for his child's happiness

again flashed across his mind in a very different light.

"Cecil," he began gravely, "tell me what is this man to you? An old friend he was undoubtedly, but is your grief that felt for a friend alone? Tell me what has passed between you? Has he abused our friendship even more than I thought, and stolen the heart of my child from me? That would indeed be an injury I should find it hard to forgive."

"He has done no wrong in this," she answered, looking up proudly, with a defiant light in her dark eyes, such as her father at least had never seen there before, and that cowed him a little, causing him to turn away and resume his monotonous walk. "I have loved him," she went on boldly now, for it behoved her to speak so that she should be understood clearly, and the matter put to rest at once and for ever,— "I have loved him ever since I could love. He has been the kindest, the truest, the most upright friend I have ever come across. What wonder was it that, being constantly in his society, seeing every day something fresh in

his character to admire and look up to, I learnt at last to love him so well that, had he not loved me too, I should have been the most miserable of women. I am not one of those who hold that affection brings its own reward, whether requited or not, and I love to think that, though circumstances have separated us, and oceans roll between us, we are one in heart more fully and entirely than before this cruel blow overwhelmed him and tore us asunder."

She ceased speaking, whilst Leveston, overcome with astonishment at the situation thus revealed to him, and wounded at the daring opposition of the child that had always been so loving and devoted, stood gazing at her, as though doubting the evidence of his senses. At length he exclaimed,

"Oh! this is too bad! Could he not have left me my one child, the only joy and solace that remained to my lonely life? Judge between us, girl, if you have any clear, unprejudiced reason left. Was it honourable, or noble, or good to steal away the love of your young heart from the father who

cared for and cherished you when you had none else to guard you? Was it the act of a true and upright man to do this, without seeking my permission and consent, which, God knows, at one time, I would have been fool enough to grant him? If I had ever doubted his guilt, this unprincipled conduct would have condemned him in my eyes, showing, as it does, how little his honour was worth."

But she rose as he was about to continue, and stood before him, holding up her hand warningly, with a majesty of gesture that, though coming from the child to the parent, he felt constrained to obey.

"Hush!" she said, and her voice was very low, though clear. "Do not blame him until you know about what you speak. If anyone has done wrong, if anyone has forgotten what was right in this matter, it is I—your daughter; and he—the man whom you condemn—he saved me from myself. I would not have told you this, but that I see you will still continue to misjudge, until you know all;

then, if you despise anyone, it will be me; but I must bear it—the sin is mine, the punishment shall also be mine. Months ago, when he first told me his love, and asked me to be his wife, I refused, for reasons that only concern myself, though he was almost as dear to me then as he is now; but there was a misunderstanding between us, and I would not consent to be anything to him at that time. Afterwards,” she went on, leaning on the table for support, and flushing painfully as she repeated what she knew must, to her auditor, appear wickedness and infatuation, whilst to her it was so right and natural—“Afterwards, when trouble came on him, and he was about to leave the country, I felt that I could not live without the chance of seeing him again. I could not think of the long hopeless days and nights, when I should be haunted by visions of him toiling wearily in foreign lands, with no loving voice to comfort or cheer him, and, worse than all, no hope that, during long, sad years, probably while life should last, we should ever meet again.



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So I went to him—I, your daughter, your little Cecil no longer, you will say, but a woman in despair!—and I begged him to take me with him anywhere, in toil, in poverty, in peril, it mattered not, so only I might be with him. Then this man, who loves me dearer than his own life, this man whom you condemn, father, asked me to think of you, to remember your affection and watchful care, and have pity on you; but I would not, I was hard as iron when I thought of you, for you had been unjust to him, and I only answered that to stay behind with you and all the rest who had been so cruel to him would kill me; that I must go, if only he would let me. Then he spoke again. I give you his very words, ‘If you will not have pity on your father, I must.’ He told me I should remain behind with you, but not as one without hope. He will come for me again, when he has made us a home, far away from evil tongues and cruel slanderers. He will ask you then for me, who am his promised wife, and, oh!

father, if you have any heart to understand the sacrifice he made when he refused the woman he loved for your sake, you will let us be happy then !”

She threw her arms round her father as she finished speaking, thinking to move him, as she had so often coaxed many and many an indulgence from him in the old days ; but he remained cold, silent, motionless, unresponsive. It was such a cruel blow now it came on him, that this, his pet and darling, should love another better than himself. That she should love and marry he had always expected, and thought natural, but then it should have been a placid, conventional, milk-and-water affection, that should still leave him occupying the highest place in her regard ; not this fierce, overwhelming, passionate feeling, that threw everything to the winds, save what concerned it only.

And then that she should have acted thus, should have offered herself to this man, and expressed herself willing to leave all for his sake ! It seemed to him impossible that his

sweet gentle child should have been so transformed, and for a moment he almost thought he must have been dreaming. But no, her arms were indeed about him, her head resting on his shoulder, and with a quick feeling of resentment, that she should simulate a love her late confession showed she must be far from feeling, he freed himself from her embrace and held her from him, saying,

“Is this true that you have been telling me, and you still dare feign affection for me? Even if it be as you say, have I not a right to be angry with the man who has stolen my little Cecil from me for ever? But this I tell you now clearly, and let it settle the matter at once and for ever between us: I shall never give my consent to your marrying him. It would be indeed a fit climax to all the trials I have endured, if my daughter should be united to one branded with the stigma of so dishonourable a deed.”

“Heaven help us both, then!” she answered sadly, withdrawing herself from her father’s arms, and refraining from telling him what she

knew would be the end of his opposition; namely, her marrying without his consent. "It will be quite time enough," she thought, "to let him know then, when all other endeavours to move him have been tried and failed."

After this Leveston went out gloomily, and she remained sitting alone, thinking of what had passed, and wondering if better times were really in store for her behind the veil of those dark three years of waiting.

Then she thought of her father—of how cold and hard he had been to her, but she did not take into account what a cruel shock it had been to him, whilst she wondered bitterly if he would continue like that during the long time they must still pass together. "I love him too," she thought, "but it cannot prevent my feeling most for Gerald, who is in trouble, and danger, and sorrow every hour of his life. I am worse off now than I ever was, for before I always had my father, at least, to comfort me."

In the meantime Leveston, very sad and

downcast, was going about his business, though no occupation could banish the thought of this new trouble. This was the worst of the child's being a girl, and having no mother who could manage her. His anger against her quickly began to evaporate, whilst against Anstruther it waxed fiercer every minute. "What had the fellow meant by falling in love with her; she was too young for such things yet, and other men didn't, so what right had he?"

Indeed Leveston would have been very glad had there been a few others equally smitten by her, for then her fancy for this fellow would probably soon wear off, and he might very likely succeed in getting her to marry another. That was rather a good idea, he thought. Yes, it was a very good way of putting an end to all difficulties, if he could persuade her to take a new love before that man returned; and really she was such a mere child, her liking for him could not be very serious.

If a little pressure would do any good,

either of coaxing, or, if that didn't succeed, perhaps severity, if he could make up his mind to be severe, she might very soon be brought over to his views.

Whilst he was meditating thus, and turning it over in his mind, he met Houston, who greeted him in a more cordial manner than was his habit even to Leveston, though many had noticed he was more friendly to Cecil's father than to anyone else. This day he was particularly gracious, asking the Captain if he would come to his hut and take something to drink, as the day was very warm. "Besides," he added, "I want to talk to you, and I can't very well do so out here."

To Houston's hut they adjourned, therefore; and there the subject was opened by the Colonel's saying,

"I hope you'll not think me interfering, Leveston, if I ask you whether you approve of Miss Leveston's driving out with Villars alone. The great respect and admiration I feel for your daughter induce



me to mention this to you, as I am quite persuaded, when she did so, she could not have been aware she was laying herself open to the gossip of all the malicious tongues in the regiment."

"Cecil out driving with Villars!" gasped Leveston. "When?—where?—surely there must be some mistake."

"I think not," answered Houston, pleased to see the Captain's agitation, and feeling as if the game was now in his own hands. "My informant was Mrs. Tennant; she was walking on the Kildare road, some two or three weeks ago, about half-past two o'clock in the afternoon, when Villars passed her, driving his dog-cart, and she was almost certain the lady with him was your daughter. She had, however, a thick veil over her face, which prevented Mrs. Tennant being absolutely certain. And I, when she told me, of course laughed at the idea, but I cannot help thinking there may have been some truth in it, and I should advise you to question the young lady closely when you go in, to make sure

there is nothing wrong going on in that quarter. Not that Miss Cecil is the sort of girl who would do a thing of the kind, were she aware that it was improper. If she has erred in this respect, you may be sure it is from ignorance, and ought to warn her."

"You are very kind, Colonel, to take such interest in her," answered Leveston. "I am afraid, like all girls, she is troublesome, however, and that I shall have my hands full trying to keep her out of mischief, presently." This he said with a sigh, thinking that, if Houston knew what he had that morning been told, he would hardly put all her escapades down to ignorance. Then, reverting to his matrimonial idea, he went on: "Tell me, Colonel, do you think that young scamp Villars is in love with her? He pays her a great deal of attention, and she seems to like him very much. Now, though rather a harum-scarum sort of chap, he isn't half a bad fellow, after all; and really, if they like to make a match of it, I don't think I should object. What do you say, Colonel?"

This didn't suit Houston's book at all, but, seeing the father was not averse to the idea of Cecil's marriage, it offered a capital excuse for declaring himself, so he answered promptly,

"It wouldn't do—indeed, if you have no objection, I have long been desirous of aspiring to your daughter's hand myself, and the fear that any proposal of the kind might not be welcome to you has hitherto kept me silent; but seeing you have no feelings of that kind, I think I may venture to declare myself, and hope you will at least look upon me with as favourable an eye as on that young cub Villars."

This was indeed a surprise for poor dull Leveston, under whose eyes the Colonel's devotion had passed unnoticed. A short time ago he had not fancied this man, but now the case was quite altered; and besides, he was sure he had heard Cecil say she liked him, therefore he answered readily—

"I can have no objection, Colonel, and, indeed, feel greatly honoured, though I think

the child herself is worthy the best match in the kingdom. You had better, however, settle matters with her yourself, for which you have always plenty of opportunity. I will find out if Mrs. Tennant's story is true, and, if so, will put a stop to any such proceedings for the future."

"All right, Leveston; I will set to work at my part of the business as soon as I see matters looking favourably for me. Latterly she has not been so friendly as at first, but that will soon wear off, I think, and I am not easily discouraged."

He did not choose to state what he knew to be the cause of her recent coldness, and Leveston was too eager for the match, and too fearful of frightening away the newly-declared suitor, to tell the real aspect of affairs, as he had discovered them that morning. When he went away, however, and thought the matter over, remembering her passionate words and determined look, it dawned on him that a long and weary time must elapse before his plan could succeed, if, in-

deed, it ever did come to anything. He was a quiet man, besides, and felt it a great bore having to go in for another scene with his fiery little daughter, of whom, to tell the truth, after the morning's exhibition, he was beginning to be a little afraid. It must be gone through, however, for a repetition of the reported act—if, indeed, it was really true—might cost him the eligible and influential son-in-law he had so happily lighted upon. Therefore, seizing an opportunity when he thought Cecil looked placid and quiet over her embroidery, he began—

“Is it true, dear, that you were out driving with Villars the other day?”

Cecil, who had been surprised at her father's gentleness and good temper after such a discovery as that of the morning, looked up quickly, with a slight flush on her face, and a still stronger feeling of surprise at the calm manner in which he spoke. Was it possible she had mistaken him altogether, and that he did not care about such things?

“It is true,” she answered, in a low voice,

feeling greatly ashamed of herself—all the more that her father appeared to have so little perception of the magnitude of her offence.

“I could not have believed it,” Leveston went on, “if you had not told me yourself. Now say what it was first led you to do so, and how long you have been in the habit of driving either with Villars or any other of the officers alone?”

“How long I have been in the habit of it?” she repeated. “Why, papa, what do you think of me? It was quite bad enough, I admit, doing it once, and for a particular purpose; but that is the only time I ever did anything of the sort, and despair was the only power that could have led me to be so imprudent. Besides, Villars knew and understood all. I could trust him not to take advantage of my indiscretion. You must remember,” she went on, “that you have always warned me against getting into any of those fast habits so common amongst girls nowadays; and you must have thought I had very

quickly fallen away from all the precepts you inculcated in me, if you fancied I was often guilty of such wildness."

"I am glad to hear that I have thought too hardly of you," he answered. "I suppose the one occasion on which you acted thus was when you went to see that man before he left the country. If anything could show you the folly of your love for him in its true light, this fact, that it led you at once into a direct violation of all my teaching from childhood up, should be sufficient to point it out clearly. But we will talk no more now about the matter. Villars, it seems, was your accomplice. I shall say nothing to him; but I had thought better of him."

"And you were right," said Cecil, boldly, for the second time that day obliged to accuse herself, to save others from unjust blame. "He refused at first to take me, and pointed out the risk I was running of falling under the censure of slanderous tongues, if discovered; but I would not listen to him, and told him I would walk to see Gerald if he would

not drive me. The fear of my keeping my word, and thus getting into worse trouble, alone decided him on helping me—indeed, I was very nearly getting angry with him, I found him so difficult to persuade, so don't blame him; and let bygones be bygones. I will not distress you by talking of my poor friend, who is so far away, and so hardly used, if you, on your side, will not speak of him as you did to-day. And, remember this, every hard word I hear of him only rivets my purpose more firmly to be all in all to him some day, and pay him with love for what he has endured."

Leveston sighed, but thought of Houston, and answered, "So be it." It seemed to him impossible that a young girl should have in her any real depth of affection, and before long he was convinced "out of sight out of mind" would be her motto, as well as that of so many others as outspoken and bold in their avowals of love at first as she had been.

After this the Colonel, feeling his ground



with her father sure, began dropping in at all hours of the day, to Cecil's great disgust. She could not but be aware that the man had some object in these constant visits; but after being caught **once** or twice, and forced to spend an **hour** or two tête-à-tête with him, during which time her manner was so cold it would have frightened a less determined lover, she took the precaution of always going out about the time he might be expected; and her grey mare, Ladybird, came in for a good deal more than its fair share of exercise during this period.

He also still attended her tea-table with a most provoking regularity, till the hospitable little Queen was driven to the mean expedient of giving him his tea as cold as she could possibly manage to make it, and finding that ineffectual, watering it abundantly also, which certainly at last had the effect of preventing his drinking it, though he still took the cup, and sipped a little, with great pretended enjoyment, never daring to complain, and willing even to take poison from her

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hands, if she would grant him nothing else.

Villars always hung about near on these occasions, anxious in any way to relieve the boredom he knew Cecil experienced. But one day his devotion met with a reward that—though rather hard as he considered at first—let him into the secret of the small feminine tortures the Colonel was enduring at the hands of their pretty, mild-looking sovereign. She one day, in a fit of abstraction, handed Houston's cup of cold, well-watered tea to Villars, which he, unsuspecting and thirsty, nearly finished before pausing sufficiently to discover the nature of the mixture with which he had been favoured.

"Good heavens, Queen!" he then cried, with sudden energy, "in the name of patience, where did you get this vile compound? You've poisoned me, and the least you can do now is to put up a handsome tablet to my memory, describing all my numerous virtues. Do you think you could do it?"

"Write your epitaph—oh! nothing could be easier. This would do, I think: 'Here lies Hed-

worth Villars, late cornet in the ——th Dragoons; better known to his sorrowing comrades by the name of Ginger'—now you mustn't interrupt me," she went on, with a return of her old merry spirit, "I haven't half done yet. 'His personal qualities were as follows: item, a merry laughing countenance; item, a small fair moustache; item, a slight upright figure; item, extra superfine hands and feet; his moral qualities——"

"Stop, Miss Leveston—now do," implored Villars. "When you get to morals, I know you're going to be down on me, and I can't bear it. As you are strong be merciful."

"You foolish creature!" she laughed, "I said your moral qualities, and not your morals; let me go on."

"If you do," he threatened, "I'll swallow the rest of this stuff, and you will see me dead at your feet before you can say Dick Robinson."

"I don't want to call on that gentleman, I'm sure," she laughed, "so pray don't finish that stuff. Give it to me," she added, "and I'll let you have something better."

And then Houston, who had been watching Villars's contortions with secret satisfaction, saw the cup taken from him, and presently returned with a decoction that was pronounced prime by the favoured subaltern.

This gave Houston a very clear idea that it was not by accident these little annoyances happened to him; but not for trifles of that kind would he relinquish the pleasure of sitting near her, and monopolizing as much conversation as he could from his audacious sub. The same afternoon, seeing the Queen and her sworn ally talking and laughing with considerable animation together, he became seized with a conviction they were laughing at him, and resolved to get that very uppish young gentleman out of the way on the first opportunity that offered.

To tell the truth, he was perfectly right. when he thought they were laughing at him; for Cecil had just been explaining to Villars, how she was accustomed to show her dislike to Houston, and how, accidentally, he (Villars) had suffered in consequence.

"I can't help it, you know," she murmured; "I can't bear him; and then he will come and plant himself so close to me, and talk to me so pertinaciously, that I get angry, and am obliged to let my rage escape, or else I should do something dreadful."

"He deserves it, the mean beggar!" was Villars' comment; "and I'll forgive you having so nearly killed me, for the sake of the satisfaction it gives me to think that fellow drinks a similar compound every day. By Jove! that's something like devotion. I didn't give him credit for being so soft, unlucky dog that he is!"

"Don't pity him, for mercy's sake, Villars," answered Cecil; "he deserves everything he gets." And then she went off to some one else, and left the young man laughing to himself at the thought of the hard time the Colonel was having, whilst endeavouring to please one who was so determined not to be pleased.

All over Ireland, about this time, the elections were approaching, and detachments of the —th Dragoons were

to be sent to different towns and counties throughout the district to which they belonged. They would not be required for a month or so yet, and before that time the —th were to move to Athlone; but the Colonel mentally determined one of the first men who went out on detachment duty should be the dashing subaltern, Villars.

“The young cur will hate that work, I know,” growled Houston; “having to be up at unearthly hours on damp drizzly mornings, perhaps when the rain is coming down as if out of a bucket, escorting voters through country roads, when the mud rises above the horses’ fetlocks; standing motionless in crowded streets, among a yelling mob of human fiends, with stones falling round him like bullets in battle; getting a crack of a shillelagh across his leg on one side, whilst a ruffian tries to hoist him out of his saddle by the other. These are a few of the little amenities you will come in for, doing election duty; and don’t I hope you may enjoy it, my fine fellow; while perhaps you may

have to sleep out under very well ventilated canvas, or think yourself lucky if you get any sort of bed under a roof at all. It strikes me you'll come back considerably sobered; and, at any rate, I'll be rid of your interference for a time, and will make the most of your absence."

Comforting himself with this prospect, the Colonel waited and bore Villars' constant intrusion with tolerable patience, though at times a very dark look would come into his eye as he noticed the manner in which Cecil turned to him on all occasions when she wanted assistance. His attendance and help seemed to have become necessary now, because in truth she knew somehow her father had gone over to the Colonel's side; and it was as a counterbalance to their combination, which she felt too strong for her, that she organised a league of her own.

In a week or two more they moved to Athlone; and there Cecil, all unconscious that her ally was about to be withdrawn from her, pursued the same system of tactics as she had at the Curragh. Villars,

however, began to have an inkling of what was coming, and said to her one day, "Your Majesty, I'm afraid I shall be going away soon."

"What! you're going on leave, are you?" she asked. "I am so sorry, for my own sake; but I hope you'll enjoy yourself, and I shall look forward to seeing you again afterwards."

"No, it's not leave," he replied, "I wish it was; but it's these infernal elections. They're the curse of the country in every way, God knows, and the curse of us wretched militaires, who for our sins happen to be quartered here at such times. I'll be one of the first sent out, you'll see. I saw it by Colonel Houston's face to-day. At your table I happened to say something about what I was going to do a short time hence, and I knew at once, by his wicked grin, he had no intention I should do anything to amuse myself for some time to come. I'd like to punch his head for him when he looks at me like that. I'm as good as he any day, though I don't happen to be Colonel, and I won't allow him or any one else to sneer at me, if I can help it."

"And he has a most unpleasant sneer, too,"



she said. "I don't wonder you dislike it. But indeed I am sorry for what you have told me. I shall miss you so much, and feel so lonely when you have gone. However, I suppose it won't be for long; these elections cannot take up much time."

"About a month, I fancy; and I think, as I said, I shall be one of the first sent out, and one of the last recalled. You'll have enough of Houston's company when I'm away, as even the tea dodge fails to keep him off."

She laughed. "Indeed I am afraid so; but if driven to despair, I shall adopt some other expedient. A man is no match for a woman in a war of artifice, as I may have to teach our Colonel."

And so they parted for a time, Villars predictions being fulfilled sooner than he thought. He received the route for a small country town in the West of Ireland next day, the detachment being in command of Captain Brabazon; which at least was a consolation, as they were sure of some fun, Villars reflected, wherever Brabazon was.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

